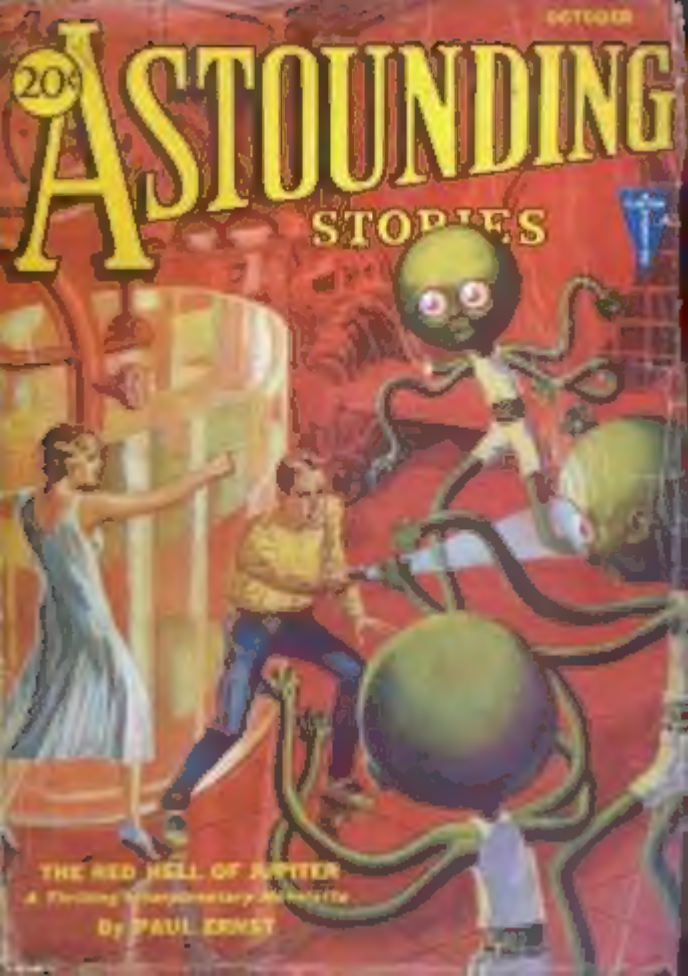
OCTOBER
20¢
ASTOUNDING
STORIES
THE RED HELL OF JUPITER
By PAUL ERNST

Announcing GENUINE BLUE WHITE DIAMONDS *at lowest prices* IN YEARS

$27.50

FC 48 . . . Engraved, Bridal Blossom 18-K Solid White Gold "step" model Wedding Ring. Seven (7) matched genuine blue-white diamonds. *Only* $2.65 *a month.*

$50

FC 51 . . . Dazzling cluster of seven (7) matched genuine blue white diamonds; baguette effect, square prong ring 18-K Solid White Gold. Looks like $750. solitaire. *Only* $4.90 *a month.*

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FC 49 . . . Richly hand engraved prong ring of 18-K Solid White Gold, with a perfect, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 2 matched genuine diamonds on sides. *Only* $4.90 *a mo.*

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FC 39 . . . **"America's Sweetheart"**—Ultra modern 18-K Solid White Gold engagement ring; genuine blue-white diamond in center, 6 matched diamonds in engraved "step" effect sides. *Only* $4.75 *a month.*

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FC 34 . . . Richly hand-engraved 18-K Solid White Gold solitaire mounting; with fiery, genuine blue-white diamond. *Only* $2.40 *a month.*

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FC 50 . . . Gentlemen's massive, "step" effect ring; 18-K Solid White Gold or 14-K Solid Green Gold. Set with a perfect, genuine, blue-white diamond. **Special terms:** $5.00 with order. *Only* $7.00 *a month.*

$75

FC 54 . . . The **"Love-Link"**—new, square prong, engagement ring, with the elegance and grace of much higher priced rings. Exquisitely hand engraved; 18-K Solid White Gold mounting; perfect, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 4 matched genuine diamonds on sides. **Special terms:** $5.00 with order. *Only* $7 *a month.*

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2 Diamonds
2 Emeralds or Sapphires

FC 53 . . . **Diamond Wrist Watch.** Two genuine diamonds and four Sapphires or Emeralds. Engraved 14-K Solid White Gold case; Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Open link bracelet to match. *Only* $3.35 *a month.*

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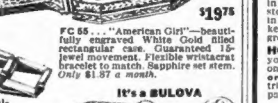
FC 55 . . . "American Girl"—beautifully engraved White Gold filled rectangular case. Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Flexible wristcarat bracelet to match. Sapphire set stem. *Only* $1.87 *a month.*

$22

FC 42 . . . Nationally advertised **Waltham** or **Elgin**; guaranteed accurate and dependable. Engraved white permanent case, open link bracelet to match. *Only* $2.10 *a month.*

It's a BULOVA



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FC 40 . . . "Lone Eagle" Dedicated to Col. Chas. A. Lindbergh—Handsomely engraved white permanent case, with a guaranteed 15-jewel **Bulova** precision movement. Radium hands and dial. Patented "dust-tite" protector. Link bracelet to match. *Only* $3.65 *a month.*

$27.50

FC 19 . . . Nationally advertised, guaranteed 15-jewel **Waltham** movement; 20-year warranted, engraved White Gold filled, 12 size, thin model, decagon case. White Gold Filled knife; fine Waldemar chain. All complete. *Only* $2.65 *a month.*

DIRECT DIAMOND IMPORTATIONS AND OVER $2,000,000 in orders yearly in our national mail order and retail chain store system, give us tremendous advantage in the world's most important buying markets—these benefits we pass on to you in the greatest values, lowest prices in our history.

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10 Days Free Trial

You have the privilege of 10 days free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond accompanies every diamond and watch purchased.

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No Embarrassing Investigations

Nearly a year to pay! No extra charge for credit—no red tape—no delay. You take no risk—**satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.**

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CATALOGUE FREE TO ADULTS

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The "MASTER MIND" of BUSINESS
The Accountant!

Holds Positions Paying $3000 to $12000 A YEAR

In the last generation a new profession has grown up—accountancy. The accountant today is considered the most important man in the business field—he is literally the brains of business. Once he is properly trained, there is no business position too big for him to fill. Yet business experts calculate that there are less than half the number of accountants now needed to fill the big positions now open to accountancy-trained men.

"GUIDED EXPERIENCE" METHOD Trains Men Quickly at Home

TODAY a new profession and a new method of teaching are opening the gates of opportunity wide, to men who once were seemingly doomed to mediocre jobs and limited chances for advancement. Until fifty years ago there were no accountants—only bookkeepers. Even twenty years ago, the new profession was a limited kind of work.

Yet today accountancy is one of the most vital factors in business. Accountancy is not bookkeeping. It involves the ability to use bookkeeping figures, yes. But the ordinary bookkeeper hasn't the training, or the knowledge, to interpret his own figures. The accountant has. An ordinary clerk, using the bookkeeper's records, cannot tell what is likely to happen in the future, on the strength of the records shown. He cannot plan, from his forecast, what to do to take advantage of an opportunity, or to prevent a disaster. The accountant can—and he does, every day. The factory worker, though he knows how much time and material it takes him to make a piece of merchandise, can't tell you where it costs the firm to turn it out. The accountant can.

That is why the accountant is the brains of business. That is why the days of slipshod record-keeping, and guesses of what the records mean. The business man has to have facts—and the accountant is the only source of accurate information. Today, accountancy knowledge not only gives a man an advantage in seeking business promotion—in many men it has meant an opportunity to build up highly profitable practices—businesses of their own, as public accountants. To cap all this, there is more than a fifty per cent undersupply of accountants in this country!

What better opportunity could you find for a man who wants to learn a profession of dignity, that assures him a chance of real importance and success—and who, through a new teaching method, finds that he can learn it easily? That is the situation today, for literally thousands of men. Today a new method of teaching accountancy, which uses college-type methods of training, has been devised to teach you right in your own home. It was designed, and is now being taught, by a group of leading accountants and accounting teachers. Certified Public Accountants who have reviewed this method, call it "The clearest and most logical method of teaching accountancy." It not only gives you mastery of the basic fundamentals of accounting—it gives complete training in the specialized branches of accountancy—Cost Accounting, Income Tax Accounting, Commercial Law. Finally, this new training gives you a complete coaching course, preparing you for Certified Public Accountancy examinations, without extra cost. Write today for your copy of "The Modern Way To Learn Accounting," the new book which explains the present opportunities in the accountancy field. It will tell you, too, the facts about this new teaching method, and about the other services which this institution gives its members. Simply mail the coupon for it today—get it without cost or obligation and find out from it how you, too, may capitalize the increasing demand for accountancy-trained men.

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Without obligation or charge, please send me my copy of the new book, "The Modern Way To Learn Accounting," and full information concerning the American University of Commerce Training in Accountancy.

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City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

20c ASTOUNDING STORIES

On Sale the First Thursday of Each Month

W. H. CLAYTON, Publisher — HARRY BATES, Editor

The Clayton Standard on a Magazine Guarantees:

That the stories therein are clean, interesting, vivid, by leading writers of the day and purchased under conditions approved by the Authors' League of America;
That such magazines are manufactured in Union shops by American workmen;
That such newsdealer and agent is insured a fair profit;
That an intelligent censorship guards their advertising pages.

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More than Two Million Copies Required to Supply the Monthly Demand for Clayton Magazines.

VOL. VIII, No. 1 — OCTOBER, 1931

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A Meeting Place for Readers of ASTOUNDING STORIES.

Single Copies, 20 Cents — Yearly Subscription, $2.00

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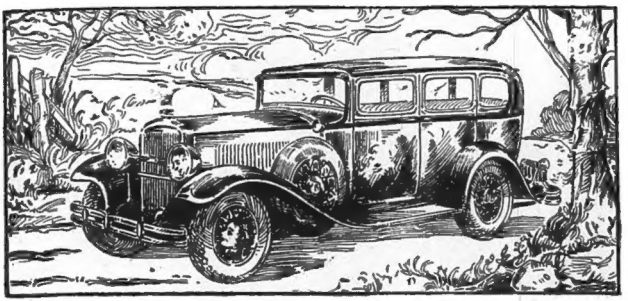
Win $3,700.00

OR BUICK 8 SEDAN AND $2,500 IN CASH



Can you find 5 faces in the picture?

Sensational money-making opportunity for everybody! You may win $3,700 if you prefer all cash or handsome latest model Buick 8 Sedan and $2,500 in cash. **This offer is made by a prominent business house for advertising purposes. Someone is going to win $3,700—why not you?**

I want to send you this prize. Act quick! Send your answer today and qualify to win.

All you do to qualify for an opportunity in this great cash prize advertising plan is to find five faces in picture.

People riding in the auto above got out of the car. Their faces are shown in odd places about the picture. Some faces are upside down, others look sideways, some look straight at you. If you can pick out 5 or more faces, mark them, clip the picture and send to me together with your name and address. Sharp eyes will find them. Can you?

Easy to Win $12,960.00 in 103 Cash Prizes

We will give away $12,960 in cash. You are sure to profit if you take an active part. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be given. **You get $3,700 if you win grand first prize.** In addition there are 102 other wonderful cash prizes. The winner of the grand second prize may win $2,200, and winner of the grand third prize may win $1,700. Also four other prizes of $500.00 each and many others. All told $12,960 in cash. Money to pay you is already on deposit in the Mercantile Trust and Savings Bank, a big Chicago Bank.

$1,000.00 for Promptness

Send your answer at once. Make sure to qualify for $1,000 extra given for promptness if you win the Buick Sedan—a total of $3,700 if you prefer all cash.

Send No Money The main thing is—send in your answer today. You can share in this advertising cash distribution. Hurry! and take no chance of losing the extra reward of $1,000 for promptness if you win grand first prize. Act now! You don't need to send a penny of your money to win! Just find five faces in the picture above and mail with coupon or write me a letter at once for particulars.

Indiana Farmer Wins $3,500!

This is a picture of Mr. C. H. Essig, Argos, Ind., taken on his farm. He writes: "Wish to acknowledge receipt of your $3,500 prize check. Oh, boy! This is the biggest sum of money I ever had in my hands. It is indeed a fortune to me."

Mrs. Kate Needham, of Oregon, won $4,705.00. Miss Serena Burbach, of Wisconsin, won $1,125. M. D. Reidman of Minnesota, won $2,560. Hundreds of men, women, boys and girls have been rewarded in our past advertising campaigns.

Send Coupon Today

ROGER SCOTT, Mgr.
427 W. Randolph St., Dept. 535, Chicago, Ill.

I have found five faces in the $3,700.00 prize picture and am anxious to win a prize. Please advise me how I stand.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State ...

$1260 to $3400 a Year

PICK YOUR JOB

Men, Women—18 to 50

These are steady positions. Strikes, poor business conditions, or politics will not affect them. Government employees get their pay for twelve full months every year.

Steps to $2700 a Year

Railway Postal Clerks get $1,000 the first year, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. $79.17 each pay day. Their pay is quickly increased, the maximum being $2,700 a year, $112.50 each pay day.

Railway Postal Clerks, like all Government employees, have a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). On runs, they usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty and vacation their pay continues just as though they were working. They travel on a Pass when on business and see the country. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension.

City Mail Carriers, Post Office Clerks

Clerks and Carriers now commence at $1,700 a year and automatically increase $100 a year to $2,100 and $2,300. They also have 15 days' paid vacation yearly. Collection is unnecessary.

Government Clerk—File Clerk

Salary $1,260 to $2,140 a year. Pleasant clerical and office work in the various government departments at Washington, D. C., and other cities throughout the country.

Is Your Job Steady?

Compare these conditions with your present or your previous employers, and choose the one that appeals to you most. Remember, a PERMANENT employment; frequently out of a position and the "army" of strangers salary very LOW. YOU GET $1,700 EVERY YEAR! HAVE YOU ANY ASSURANCE THAT A FEW YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL ONLY $2,100 to $2,700 A YEAR?

You Can Get These

Experience is usually unnecessary and political influence is not permitted. Let us show you how.

Get Free List of Positions

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—NOW, at once.

This investment of two cents for a postage stamp may result in your getting a government job.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. G-272, Rochester, N. Y.

Rush to me entirely free of charge: (1) a full description of the position checked below; (2) Free Copy of 32-page book "How to Get a U. S. Government Job"; (3) A list of the U. S. Government Jobs now obtainable; (4) Tell me how to get a Government Job.

- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk.....($1,600-$2,700)
- ☐ Post Office Clerk.....($1,700-$2,300)
- ☐ City Mail Carrier.....($1,700-$2,100)
- ☐ Rural Mail Carrier.....($2,100-$2,400)
- ☐ Government Clerk—File Clerk.....($1,260-$2,580)
- ☐ Inspector of Customs.....($2,100-$3,300)
- ☐ Prohibition Agent.....($2,300-$2,600)
- ☐ Immigrant Inspector.....($2,100-$3,000)

Name.....

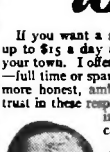
Address.....

Use This Coupon Before You Misplace It

LOCAL MANAGERS WANTED

UP TO $15 a Day to Start

If you want a steady job, I'll show you how to make up to $15 a day as Local Manager of my business in your town. I offer you steady, year-round employment—full time or spare time. Right now I need about 250 more honest, ambitious men and women that I can trust in these responsible positions. I have good openings in every locality for those who can qualify.



I make everything plain and easy—show you what to do—furnish everything you need to start—put up all the capital and give you liberal credit. *You don't have to invest any money.*

All you do is call on my customers and prospects and take care of their orders for tea, coffee, spices, extracts and other Household Products. Everybody needs food. This means a steady, permanent repeat business and big profits every day. Low prices and highest quality guaranteed by old-established million-dollar Company.

If you can give me a little spare time you should be able to clear $2 to $3 an hour. If you devote full time you may find yourself earning not only $15 a day but maybe *twice that much.*

In this small space I can't give you full details, but if you will send me your name, I'll tell you all about my liberal Profit-Sharing Plan and show you how to get started making money at once. I expect this employment offer will bring a flood of applications, so mail the coupon right away—before one of your neighbors gets in ahead of you.

MAIL FOR APPLICATION

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Without cost or obligation, please tell me about the position as Local Manager now open in my town. I understand no experience is required to get established, and that I don't have to invest any money.

Name.....

Address.....

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O. A. P. Co. (Print or Write Plainly)

MEN!

Get Your Copy of My *New* Book

It shows You

How to get ready for a good job in Radio, Talking Movies, Television

Many fine Jobs paying $50, $60, $75, $100 a week are opening in Radio every year

I showed these men how to get *Big Pay* jobs like *these*

Seldom Under $100 a Week

"My earnings in Radio are many times larger than I ever expected I could be when I enrolled. In November alone, I earned $2277. Before I began my Radio business seldom fell under $100 a week. I earnestly recommend this to give you some idea of what a Radio man can do who has the training." — R. E. Whisenhunt, 1267 W. 66th St., Seattle, Wn.

$3,000 a Year in Own Business

"I cannot give N. R. I. too much credit for what I have done and am to be in Radio. I am under no that I over-estimate a year for the last three years. I am in the Radio business here. Any man who really wants to succeed can go wrong in Radio. There is certainly a lot of Radio men." — Fred A. Mizner, P. O. Box 207, Raton, Colo.

Your Choice of Any One of My 5 Advanced Courses Without Extra Charge

My training not only gives you a thorough knowledge of Radio—all you need to get and hold a good job—but, in addition, you may take any one of my new advanced courses, and specialize, without extra charge. They are:

1. **TELEVISION Theory and Practice**
2. **AIRCRAFT RADIO**
3. **BROADCASTING Commercial and Ship Radio Stations**
4. **SOUND PICTURES AND PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEMS**
5. **ADVANCED RADIO SERVICING AND MERCHANDISING**

"Rich Rewards in Radio" gives an outline of these courses. Mail the coupon for your free copy.

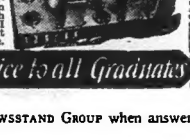
If you are earning a penny less than $50 a week, send for my book of information on opportunities in Radio. It is free. Radio's amazing growth is opening many fine jobs every year. My book shows you where these jobs are, what they pay, how I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Expert.

You have many jobs to choose from

Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers and pay $1,200 to $5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually need testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, buyers, for jobs paying up to $7,500 a year. Shipping companies, police departments, commercial land stations, aircraft companies, pay Radio operators well. Dealers and jobbers are always on the lookout for good service men, salesmen, buyers, managers and pay $30 to $100 a week for good men. Talking movies pay as much as $75 to $200 a week to men with Radio training. There are openings almost everywhere for have a spare-time or full-time Radio business of your own—to be your own boss. Radio offers many other opportunities. My book tells you about them.

New 8 Outfits give you Extensive Practical Radio Experience

With me you not only get the theory of Radio —you also get practical Radio experience while learning. You can build over 100 circuits—build and experiment with the circuits used in Atwater-Kent, Majestic, Crosley, Eveready, Stewart-Warner, Philco, and many other sets. These experiments include A. C. and screen grid sets, push pull amplification and other late features. When you finish my course you won't need to take "any old job" just to get experience—you will be trained and experienced ready to take a responsible job in the Radio field of your choice—a good job with a real future.



Back view of 8-tube A. C. screen grid tuned Radio frequency set —only one of many circuits you can build with the parts I give without extra charge.

I will Train You at Home in your Spare Time

Hold your job until you are ready for another. No need to leave home. All I ask is part of your spare time. I have doubled and tripled the salaries of hundreds through my practical home-study training. You don't have to be a high school or college graduate. My course is written in easy, simple terms that most anyone can understand.

My Course Includes Talking Movies, Television, Aircraft Radio

My course is up-to-date with Radio's latest uses and improvements. It includes Radio's application to Talking Movies, Television and home Television experiments, Radio's use in Aviation, in addition to fitting you for many other lines.

Money Back If Not Satisfied

I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lesson Texts and Instruction Service when you have finished my course. This agreement is backed by the Pioneer and World's Largest organization devoted entirely to training men and young men by the Home-Study Method for good jobs in the Radio industry.

Find out what Radio offers You Don't Risk a Penny

My book, "Rich Rewards in Radio," gives the facts on Radio's opportunities and the many features and services of my training. It gives 100 letters from students who testify that my methods are successful. Get your copy today. There is no obligation.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 1-KM
Washington, D. C.

THIS COUPON IS GOOD FOR ONE *FREE* COPY OF MY NEW BOOK

Mail NOW

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National Radio Institute
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Dear Mr. Smith:—Send me your book. I want to see what Radio offers and what you offer in Radio training. This request does not obligate me and no agent will call.

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Address.....Age.....

City.....State.....

Lifetime Employment Service to all Graduates

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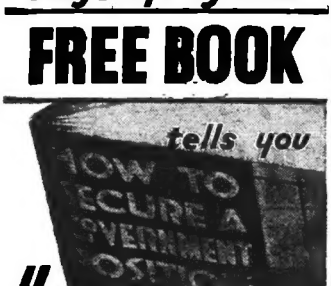


How to get a GOV'T POSITION

I have shown thousands of fellows like you the way to secure the well-paid, permanent Civil Service jobs they now hold. And the very FIRST step they took was to send for my FREE BOOK. Get it quick! It tells you exactly what I would, if you came to see me in Rochester. It tells in just the book title you EVERYTHING you want to know about getting a Government Position. Here are a few "high spots":

PAGE 4 — **Tells What Uncle Sam Pays**
Here's the finest, squarest boss in the world. You don't have to worry all the time about layoffs or being "fired." HARD TIMES DO NOT AFFECT THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYED; and he gets an average of $200 a year more than other workers. Railway Postal clerks start at $1,800 a year—can work up to higher paid jobs. My book gives salaries of every branch.

PAGE 9 — **Tells How You Pick Your Job**
Pick the job you want: I'll help you get it. You can work in your home town, travel or work in Washington, D. C. Uncle Sam has many openings.

PAGE 12 — **Tells How I Prepare You Quickly**
For eight years I was Official Examiner of the Civil Service Commission, so I know just what kind of questions are asked. You can depend upon me to coach you to help you pass HIGH, and be offered one of the FIRST jobs open.

PAGE 18 — **Tells About Raises Every Year**
You don't have to take the boss's vague promise of a raise—and never get it. You can depend on your increase from Uncle Sam. Read all about this BIG ADVANTAGE in my FREE BOOK.

PAGE 16 — **Tells About Vacations With Pay**
In some positions you get up to 30 days with pay every year, and up to 90 days sick leave. See my book for full information on this liberal plan.

PAGE 10 — **Tells About Civil Service Pensions**
Uncle Sam doesn't chuck you out when you're "too old." He retires you on a generous pension. Get my book and read all about this.

MAIL COUPON TODAY!

If you're an American citizen, 18 to 50, you can quit worrying FOREVER about losing your job or being laid off. I mean it! There's a wonderful PERMANENT position waiting for you in the Civil Service.

You can be a Railway Postal Clerk, Postmaster, Customs Service Man, Panama Canal Clerk, or get any of the other positions described in my book. Send for it NOW and find out how I help you GET THE JOB YOU WANT! Get ready NOW for NEXT Railway Postal Clerk examination! Mail the coupon today!

A. R. Patterson, Civil Service Expert, PATTERSON SCHOOL, 166A Wisner Building, Rochester, N. Y.

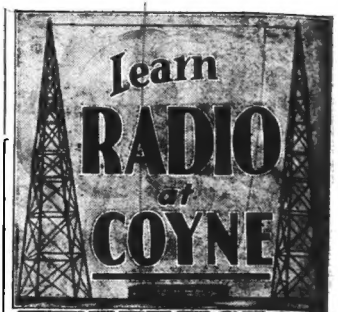
ARTHUR R. PATTERSON, Civil Service Expert,
PATTERSON SCHOOL, 166A Wisner Bldg., Rochester, N. Y.

Send me your big FREE BOOK telling how I can secure a position with the U. S. Government paying from $1,250 to $3,300 a year with excellent chances for advancement. This doesn't obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....



TELEVISION TALKING PICTURES

Dissatisfied with your present job? Not making enough money? Then let me show you how to prepare for a real job at a real pay, in RADIO—one of the fastest growing, biggest money-making trades on earth.

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The two fighting men circled warily.

In the Orbit of Saturn

By R. F. Starzl

THE *Celestia,* gliding through space toward Titan, major satellite of Saturn, faltered in her course. Her passengers, mostly mining engineers and their wives, stockholders, and a sprinkling of visitors, were aware of a cessation of the heavens' apparent gyrations, due to the halting of the ship's rotation on its axis. At the same time the ship's fictitious gravity, engendered by the centrifugal force of its rotation, ceased, so that passengers, most of whom were assembled in the main salon, which occupied the entire midship section, drifted away from the curved

Disguised as a voluntary prisoner on a pirate space ship, an I. F. P. man penetrates the mystery of the dreaded "Solar Scourge."

floor, whose contour followed that of the outer skin, to flounder in helpless confusion.

A woman screamed. A rasping sound, as of metal scraping against the hull, came from one point in the circumference, and here the portholes were obscured by a dark mass that blotted out the stars.

An old man, clinging to a luxuriously upholstered chair, and pale with fright, cried:

"It's those damned pirates. If they find out who I am it'll break the company to ransom me."

"If the company thinks it worth while to ransom you," retorted his youngish, saturnine companion, who seemed less scared than annoyed.

Questions darted back and forth. No word came from the control room forward, and little of what transpired outside could be seen through the thick glass ports. The pirate ship loomed over them like a monstrous leech, its bolts sharply etched in black and white by the sunlight from their stern. Beyond that was only the velvety darkness—the absolute vacuity of space that carries no sound, refracts no light. A battle was raging out there, but of that nothing could be seen or heard in the salon. Only a dull, booming vibration through the flyer's hull, made by the rockets in a useless effort to shake off their captor.

OF all the passengers, none understood the situation as well as Quirl Finner. In imagination he followed the desperate struggle that was going on out there, for the men who were selling their lives were his companions in arms, the ship's guard of the redoubtable I. F. P., the Interplanetary Flying Police who carried the law of white men to the outermost orbit of the solar system.

Quirl bristled, but he maintained his pose of indifference—of the sightseeing passenger who depended blindly on the ship's crew for his own safety. In appearance he might easily have been the pampered son of some millionaire that he impersonated. His close-fitting silken tunic of blue, with its bright yellow roll-collar, the turban of fine yellow lace, the close-fitting trousers that showed his lithe yet powerfully molded legs, the thin-soled low boots—all proclaimed him the typical time-killing dandy of the times. His superb proportions made him look smaller, lighter than he really was, and his lean features, which under the I.F.P. skullcap would have looked hawk-like, were sufficiently like the patrician fineness of the character part he was playing. Young men of means in the year 2139 were by no means without their good points. They indulged in athletic sports to counteract the softening influence of idleness, and so Quirl Finner had no misgivings about the success of his disguise.

Yet he could not refrain from listening intently for every sound that penetrated the hull. His part was to be captured by the pirate, who had been named "The Solar Scourge" by sensational newscasters, and to learn all he could, and eventually to be ransomed by a "wealthy father" with his priceless information. So he waited, chafing, while men he knew, men who had faced the perils of space with him, met their death.

After a time there came the sudden crackling of the air-tight bulkhead which separated the salon from the forward sections. Quirl knew what this meant. The pirates had succeeded in breaching a hole through the ship's skin, and the air of the forward section had rushed into space. It was sickening to think of those brave men up there caught in the suddenly formed vacuum. Long before the bulkhead had ceased crackling he knew they were dead, and that the pirate crew had entered, wearing vacuum suits, and was even then replenishing the air so the passengers could be taken alive.

THEY had been in the prison hold of the pirate ship for five days, terrestrial time. This was nothing like the spacious quarters they had occupied before. A cross-section of their prison would have looked like a wedge with a quarter circle for its blunt end. The curved wall of the great cylindrical projectile, nearly a hundred feet in diameter, was their floor, on which they could walk like flies on the inside of a wheel rim. The walls of the room, on two sides, converged toward the top, until they joined the sides of a well-like tunnel that ran from the nose of the ship to its tail, where the rocket nozzles were. A door pierced the tunnel side, and under this door was a metal platform, from which one could either climb into the passage or down a ladder into the hold. A pirate guard held this platform, from where he could peer over the top of a curtain which gave scant privacy to the men and women prisoners on either side of it.

On the floorplates, without even the meager comfort of the dried Martian weeds that had been given to the women, sat or lay the men. They showed their dejection, their faces covered with new growths of beard, their clothes crumpled and torn. The only furniture consisted of a long, light metal table on the women's side, securely bolted to the floor. The prisoners were obliged to stand at this when eating their meals. The whole cheerless scene was coldly illuminated by a single light-emanating disk just under the guard's platform.

Steps echoed hollowly metallic from above. Quirl wondered if it was already time for the galley boy to bring the immense bowl of hot stew for the noon meal.

IT was not. It was Moby Gore, the huge and overbearing first mate of the pirates on his daily mission of inspection and prisoner baiting. Quirl crept further into his corner. It would be fatal to his plan for him to attract the attention of this petty tyrant. It was hard enough to keep away from him—to crush back the almost overwhelming desire to fly at him, fists hammering.

Gore came down the ladder deliberately, pausing on the lower steps to look around with his little, pig's eyes. His head was set well forward on his thick, muscular neck, so that he had to look out from under his beetling brows in a manner peculiarly ape-like. His heavy face was smooth-shaven, and his blue-black jowls and chin looked painfully smooth. His coarse, black hair was brushed back and plastered firmly to his bullet head.

His body was heavy, but moved with deadly smoothness and precision. The customary harness which passed around his naked torso supported a double-barreled ironizing electrocution pistol, and also a short, savagely knobbed riot club. Depending from the belt at his waist were short pants, which displayed the thick, hairy legs with their cable-like muscles. On his feet were thick socks, so that his toes were able to curl around the rungs of the ladder.

Satisfied with his quick, darting inspection, Gore now came all the way down. At the foot of the ladder lay an elderly man in the oblivion of sleep. Gore's foot came down on the thin chest. With savage pleasure he bore down, so that the old man's startled squawk ended in a fit of coughing. Gore cuffed him aside roughly, growling:

"Old squiffer! Let that learn you to sleep out of the way!" He laughed coarsely when one of the prisoners, with the temerity of anonymity, started to boo, but received no support.

CARELESSLY Gore passed among the prisoners. Here and there he halted, snatching some arti-

cle of finery or inconspicuous bit of jewelry that he had overlooked before. They shrank from him, only too glad to see him pass on to the next unfortunate.

"You, there!" Gore rasped, indicating Quirl with his stubby forefinger. "Come on out o' there, you!"

Quirl hoped that the brutal mate would not hear the thudding of his beating heart, or that if he did, he would take it for fear. He came slowly toward Gore, who was greedily eyeing the young man's brightly colored and valuable tunic. Quirl came too slowly.

"What do you take me for?" Gore bellowed in unreasonable anger. He strode forward, the prisoners scattering before him. His large, knotty hand closed on Quirl's arm, and jerked, with the intention of whirling this reluctant prisoner across the room. But Quirl was heavier, and his arm harder, than Gore had supposed. The hand came away, and with a tearing scream, the beautiful silk garment ripped off, ruined, disclosing Quirl's white and well-knit body.

"You done that a-purpose!" Gore roared, and then his great ape's arms were around Quirl, trying to break his back.

But that seemingly slight body would not bend, and, as much as Gore might tug and heave, he could not force Quirl back. The little pig-eyes glared, and there was death in them. Suddenly Gore let go. His hand leaped to the short club at his side, and he swung the weapon in a vicious arc. Quirl's relaxed forearm met it, sapping most of its force. Yet when it struck his head it seemed to burst like a ball of fire. He crashed against the wall and sank to the floor only half conscious.

"Gore! Gore!" yelled the guard from the platform, "'member how sore the Old Man was about the last terrie you killed? Better lay off."

"Shut yo'r damned mug!" Gore yelled back. But he gave up his idea of kicking the prisoner, and with a menacing glare for the guard, passed on.

AS Quirl's mind slowly cleared he congratulated himself for his repression. During his struggle with Gore his hand had come in contact with the butt of the mate's electrogun. He could easily have pulled it out of its holster and turned it against its owner. But this hasty action would not only have assured his own death, but would have destroyed the only chance the I.F.P. had of learning "The Scourge's" secrets.

Gore slowly worked his way to the women's side of the hold. Here, much to the amusement of the guard and himself, he began stripping off their long, flowing robes, disclosing their nude bodies. He seemed to see particular humor in heaping indignity on the older women, commenting coarsely on their shortcomings. The men viewed this with set, pale faces. But none dared to interfere. In their midst was an object lesson, his head swathed in bandages. He had been the first to resent this exhibition, an almost daily event, when the mate's roving eye had happened to alight upon his wife.

All at once Gore's careless and derogatory progress was halted, and he stared with terrifying intentness at the girl who had until that day managed to escape his notice. Gore had torn off a nondescript black cape that had covered her head and face, and the golden silk robe she wore. To Quirl, watching from a space of some sixty feet, her beauty came like a shock. He remembered her as Lenore Hyde, whom he had seen only once before as she emerged briefly from her stateroom.

About five feet, six inches tall, her slim figure was dwarfed by the huge bulk of the mate. Her golden hair tumbled over her slim shoulders, al-

most to her waist, where a tasseled cord held the clinging silk close to her. Her face, so white that it seemed like silver in that gorgeous setting, was cold and defiant. There was no fear in those deep blue eyes under the straight brows—only loathing and contempt.

Gore was not concerned with the personal feelings of his prize. He licked his wide, cruel lips, seizing the girl's arm as in a vise. His other big, dirty hand slipped into the collar of her robe.

BUT the ripping of fabric did not come. Instead there was a sharp crack, and Gore, too surprised even to move, stared at the little man who had hit him.

Again *crack!* The impact of fist on jaw. The blow was too weak to hurt this toughened veteran of countless battles. But slowly a tide of dull red welled up over the bull neck, turning the blue-black jowls to purple, and the walls echoed to Gore's roar of anger.

Again the fists of the smaller man smacked, this time drawing a trickle of blood from Gore's mouth. Then the thick fingers closed on the brave passenger's wrist, and the tremendous muscles swelled as, with a quick movement, Gore thrust his adversary back of him, grasping the other wrist also. Then with slow, irresistible motion, he began drawing the thin arms forward, stretching them, until the unfortunate man, drawn against the barrier of Gore's back, began to shriek with pain.

Still Gore pulled, grinning evilly, and his victim's shoulder blades lifted under the tight skin of his back as they took the strain. Shriek followed shriek, until the guard on the platform glanced furtively out into the central well. There came a dry, tearing crackle as the bones of the arms were drawn out of their sockets, and then the shrieks ceased as merciful unconsciousness came. Gore tossed the limp body carelessly away.

"The beast!" Quirl gritted his teeth. But he stayed where he was, hiding his clenched fists, for his was a specific assignment, and men of the I.F.P. know the meaning of the word "duty."

In a better humor again, Gore looked around.

"Come on, you little ginny!" he chortled. "I see you! Come to Moby, my beauty. You'll be queen of the hold, and this scurvy litter will kiss your feet every day."

HE pursued her as she ran, bowling over or trampling on the fear-stricken prisoners as they tried to scramble out of his way, men and women alike. But she made up in agility what she lacked in strength, lifting up the hem of her robe so that her legs twinkled bare, ducking under Gore's outstretched arms, or leaping over the fallen form of some stumbling, panic-stricken unfortunate.

Only in her eyes was there a true picture of her terror. Gore's uncertain temper was changing again, and in a few moments he was cursing foully, his little red-rimmed eyes glistening, as he dashed after her with short, boar-like rushes.

Again she skimmed past where Quirl cowered in simulated fear, and the look she gave him struck straight at the disguised officer's heart. So it was that when she slipped and fell to her knees, and Gore charged in with a triumphant laugh, Quirl met him with no thought of anything, no feeling but the joy of battle, the delight of a strong man when he meets a foe whom he hates. And to that heady, feral emotion was added the unforgettable picture of a lovely face whose obvious fear was somehow tempered by hope and confidence—in him!

As Gore lunged past, Quirl struck him. It was a short, sharp, well-

timed jab that would have knocked out an ordinary man. But Gore was by no means ordinary. The blow laid open his cheek against the jawbone, but Gore scarcely slowed as he swerved. With a bellow of rage, he came straight at Quirl, arms outstretched.

Philosophers have said that no matter how far the human race advances in the sciences, its fundamental reactions will still be atavistic. Gore could have dispatched Quirl in a second with his ray weapon, with perfect safety. Yet it is doubtful that the weapon even entered his mind. As he came to the battle he was driven only by the primitive urge to fight with his hands, to maim, to tear limb from limb like the great simians whom he resembled.

TO Quirl, coolly poised, the picture of Gore did not inspire terror. In the passengers, it did. They saw a brutal giant, gorilla-like, and roaring like a beast, charging at a half-naked youth apparently only half his size. It seemed that those tremendous arms must break him at the first touch.

But the grasping hands slipped off the lithe body as if it were oiled, leaving only angry red welts along Quirl's ribs. As the officer edged away he planted two blows on Gore's nose, which began to bleed freely.

Again Gore rushed, and *spat! spat!* two seemingly light blows landed on his face, opening a cut above his eye and another on his cheek bone. In a few seconds of battling he had become a shocking sight, with his features almost obscured by welling blood.

Again Quirl measured him, and this time, instead of evading the grasp of the mate's eager arms, he stepped right between them. Like a wraith he slipped into their embrace, and before they could grasp him, standing so close that his chest almost touched his adversary's, he whipped a right to Gore's jaw. It was the kind of punch that makes champions, a whiplike lash of the forearm, with relaxed muscles that tighten at the moment of impact. A punch with "follow-through" fit to knock out ninety-nine men out of a hundred.

But it did not knock out Gore, and Quirl had to pay dearly for his error. Gore was staggered, but his mighty arms closed, hugging his slighter opponent to his hairy chest so that the breath was choked out of him, and the metal studs on his harness gouged cruelly into Quirl's flesh. His face was blue before he could work his arm loose, and begin to prod with stiffened fingers at Gore's throat. Gore had to let go then, and Quirl broke away, boxed for a few moments until he had recovered, and then proceeded to chop Gore's face beyond any semblance of humanity.

The mate had dropped his ray weapon, and now searched for it with blinded eyes. He flung his riot club, and it flew wide of the mark. It was obvious that he was going to be beaten into insensibility.

THE guard on the platform, seeing the trend of the battle, shouted hoarsely up the well, and in a few minutes four men, hard-bitten, villainous looking fellows, tumbled down the ladder and joyously joined in the fray. It was then only a matter of seconds before Quirl lay on the floor-plates, battered and bleeding, but still feebly fighting, while Gore sat astride him, seeking with vicious fingers for Quirl's eyes. At the same time his men were kicking at the helpless man's body wherever they could reach him.

At the sight of this brutality the other prisoners, forgetting for the moment their own cowed condition, set up such a bedlam of noise that the guard began to look furtively up the passage, and to shout at the ruffians.

Suddenly he was whirled aside, and a figure in uniform, moving with uncanny speed for a man so massive, appeared upon the platform and bounded down the ladder. He was among the struggling men on the floor in a moment, and became a maze of flailing arms and legs. Like tenpins the pirates scattered, and the giant pulled off the mate. Gore could not see, but as he writhed he knew he was in the grip of the pirate captain. Captain Strom's harsh, ascetic face was dangerous, and his steely gray eyes compelling. The men managed slovenly salutes.

"Gore," Strom snapped, "have your men get some water and mop up this blood. How many times have I told you to quit mauling the prisoners? D'ye think I'm in this business to provide amusement for you? Henceforth keep out of this hold. Hear?"

"Yes, sir," Gore muttered sullenly.

"Took five of you bums to handle him, did it?" Strom remarked sardonically, stooping to pick up the unconscious Quirl. He carried him easily, up the ladder. As they disappeared Strom's voice boomed out:

"Dr. Stoddard! Stoddard! Messenger, have Stoddard report at my cabin."

THE mate was wiping the blood off his face with a rag.

"I tried to call yer," the guard whined.

"That tears it!" Gore exclaimed fiercely, bursting into a string of abuse. But one of his henchmen nudged him.

"Keep yer tongue in yer face, Gore, till the time comes."

Gore said nothing, but glared savagely at the prisoners.

"Get the buckets and mops!" he snarled at his men, and they fled precipitately.

A long, wailing noise came through the hatch:

"Soopson! S-o-o-pson!"

"Here comes yer grub, damn you," Gore growled at the prisoners in general. A shuffling sound followed the singsong call, and then a "galley boy" of forty years or so, badly crippled by club-feet, shuffled up to the hatch and laboriously let himself down to the platform. The huge bowl of stew he was carrying was far too heavy for him, and his strained, thin face was beady with sweat.

"Get a move on, Sorko!" Gore bellowed up at him. "Get your swill down here. Some o' these swine are goin' short this time, anyway."

Sorko set the big bowl down at the top of the steps and began to descend backward. Then he resumed his burden.

But he was nervous, and had barely started when his crippled feet, far too big for his thin shanks, became entangled. He gave a giddy shriek and fell over backward, landing on his back, and lay still. His pale, freckled face became greenish.

But the bowl, filled to the brim by its greasy, scalding hot contents, flew in a sweeping parabola, tipping as it fell, so that the entire contents cascaded on Gore, drenching him from head to foot. Howling with rage and pain he danced around. He was utterly beside himself. When he was able to see he rushed for Sorko, who was moaning with returning consciousness, and picked up the frail body to hurl it against the floor.

"Stop, or you're dead!"

THAT voice, so incisive and clear, was a woman's. Gore found himself looking into the little twin funnels of his own ray projector. They were filled with a milky light, and the odor of ozone was strong. The girl had only to press the trigger and a powerful current would leap along the path of those ionizing beams. And Gore would murder no more.

Stupidly, he let Sorko slide to the floor, where the poor fellow recovered sufficiently from his paralyzing fright and his fall to scuttle away.

Looking past the menacing weapon, Gore saw the girl, Lenore Hyde. Her limpid eyes under their straight brows were blazing, and he read in them certain death for himself.

"Up that ladder!" she ordered sharply, "and stay out! Guard, when this beast is gone I will give you this weapon. Now, connect up your skipper."

Too surprised to disobey, the guard threw the televisor switch, and in a moment Strom's stern face appeared on the screen. He comprehended the situation immediately.

"Do as she says," he ordered brusquely. "Stoddard is coming to take care of that man of hers that Gore beat up."

A few minutes later she was tearfully assisting the ship's doctor to put the man with the dislocated shoulders on a stretcher.

"Your husband?" asked Stoddard, who resembled a starved gray rat.

"My brother," she exclaimed simply.

"Want to take care of him?" And at her eager assent, he said, "Can't afford to let him die. Your family got money?"

"Yes, yes! They will pay anything —anything—to get him back safely."

The doctor grinned with satisfaction.

MEMORY returned to Quirl with the realization that he was lying on a metal bunk in an outside stateroom, where he could see the orderly procession of the stars through the floor ports as the ship rotated. His body was racked with pain, and his head seemed enormous. His sensation, he discovered, was due to a thick swathing of bandages.

As he stirred something moved in an adjoining bunk, and Dr. Stoddard's peaked face came into view.

"How do you feel?" he asked professionally.

"Rotten!"

"We'll fix that." He left, returning a few minutes later with a portable apparatus somewhat resembling its progenitor, the diathermy generator. He disposed a number of insulated loops about Quirl's body and head, connecting them through flexible cables to his machine. As a gentle humming began, Quirl was conscious of an agreeable warmth, of a quickening all over his body. A great lassitude followed, and he slept.

When he awoke again Captain Strom was standing beside him. He had taken off his coat, and his powerful body filled the blouse he was wearing. He had evidently just come off duty, for he still had on his blue trousers, with the stripes of gold braid down the sides.

"It may interest you, Mr. Finner, that I have selected you as one of the chosen," he remarked casually.

"One of the chosen what?"

"The chosen race. You didn't take me for an out-and-out damned pirate, did you?"

"Excuse me if I seem dumb!" Quirl hoisted himself on his elbow. "Yes, I figure you're a pirate. What else?"

STROM'S stern face relaxed in a smile. It was a strange smile, inscrutably melancholy. It revealed, beneath the hardness of a warrior, something else; the idealism of a poet. When he spoke again it was with a strange gentleness:

"To attain one's end, one must make use of many means, and sometimes to disguise one's purpose. For instance, it is perfectly proper for an officer of the I.F.P. to disguise himself like a son of the idle rich in order to lay the infamous 'Scourge' by the heels, isn't it?"

Quirl felt himself redden. And a cold fear seemed to overwhelm him. He realized that Strom was a zealot, and he knew he would not hesitate to kill. This prompt penetration of his disguise was something he had not bargained for.

"What makes you think," he asked shortly, "that I'm an I.F.P. man?"

"The fight you gave Gore and his men. Do you expect me to think that a coupon clipper could have done that? I know the way of—"

He checked himself. Quirl said:

"My people have money. I don't know what you mean about—"

"Oh, yes, you do," Strom interrupted. "If you were what you claim to be perhaps I would let you go for the ransom, though you took my eye from the first."

"The ransom will be paid."

"It will not. You will be one of those who do not return. There is only one price I will accept from you."

"Yes? What is that?"

"The formula of the new etheric ray."

"I don't know the I.F.P. secrets. I told you that."

"You know how to operate the ray. All its men do. I want you to tell me what you know. I can deduce the rest."

QUIRL thought rapidly. Strom was right. The I.F.P. had developed a new ray that was far superior to the ionizer ray, for the latter required an atmosphere of some kind for its operation, while the new one would work equally well in a vacuum.

"I never heard of any," he lied stubbornly. "Anyway, what do you want a ray for? Your guns, with no gravity to interfere and no air to stop the bullets, have just about unlimited range, haven't they?"

"Spoken like a soldier!" Again Strom permitted himself a brief triumphant smile. "And we have the further advantage of invisibility. The ship is surrounded by a net of wires that create a field of force which bend light rays around us. That explains why your men have never caught us. But to get back to our subject. I will tell you something. Do you know who I am?"

Quirl looked at him. Strom appeared to be at least sixty years old. But the fine, erect figure, the rugged features told nothing.

"Did you ever hear of Lieutenant Burroughs?" Strom asked casually.

"Burroughs—the man without a planet!" Quirl ejaculated. "Are you Burroughs, the traitor?" Immediately he regretted his heedlessness. Strom's face darkened in anger, and for a moment the pirate captain did not reply. When he did he was a little calmer.

"Traitor they called me!" he exclaimed vehemently. "I a traitor—the most loyal man in the solar system guard. Surrounded by rottenness and intrigue—

"But you wouldn't know. You were but a lad learning to fly your first toy helics when that happened. Years later the Martian Cabal was exposed, and the leading plotters—the traitors—were punished. But that was not till later, and the court's irreversible decree against me had been carried out. I, the unsuspecting messenger, the loyal, eager dupe, was made the cat's-paw. I was put on an old, condemned freighter, with food and supplies supposed to last me a lifetime, but with no power capsules and no means of steering the ship. I was set adrift in a derelict on a lonely orbit of exile around the sun—the man without a planet!

"PICTURE that, lad. That rusty, dead old cylinder, coursing around and around the sun, and inside, sitting on his bales and boxes, a young man like you. A young man in the pride and prime of his life, expiating the treason that had betrayed him. Day after day, through the thick ports, I saw the same changeless scene. And every two years, when I drew near the Earth, I watched the beautiful green ball of it, with what bitter longings! As I watched it dwindle away again into

the blackness of space, I thought of the fortunate, selfish, stupid and cruel beings who lived on it, and hated them. They had banished me, an innocent man, to whirl forever and ever around the sun, in my steel tomb!

"But that cruel judgment was never executed. Seven years ago this Gore found me. He is an escaped convict, and he came in a little five-man rocket he had stolen. We loaded up all of the supplies the little ship would hold, for Gore had no food, and escaped to Titan, landing on an island on the side opposite to where the mines are.

"Gore wanted to become a pirate, and as he could get men, I consented. He scraped them up, fugitives from justice, everyone of them. We built this ship, and I invented the invisibility field of force—"

"Just a moment," Quirl interrupted, vastly interested. "I saw your ship through the ports that day."

"True. The presence of your ship in the field distorted it so much that it was ineffective. But at all other times—right now—we are utterly invisible. One of the I.F.P. patrols may pass within a mile of us and never see us.

"As we raided the interplanetary commerce, I began to weed out the people we captured. Those that showed the highest intelligence, sense of justice and physical perfection I selected to be the nucleus of a new race, to be kept on Titan for a time and then to be transplanted to a new planet of one of the nearer solar systems.

"My principal trouble is with the crew. They can collect ransom only on those I reject, and there are constant clashes between me and Gore. It is now my intention to let them go their way, and to fit out a new ship, with a new crew. I offer you the place of first mate."

"No!" Quirl replied crisply. "You say you understand the honor of the Force, and then offer me a job pirating with you. No, thanks!"

STROM, or Burroughs, made no attempt to conceal his disappointment. The recital of his wrongs had brought out the bitter lines of his face, and the weariness of one who plays his game alone and can call no one friend.

"I should have known better," he said quietly. "There was none more loyal to the I.F.P. than I—when I still belonged to it. Yet, I thought if I laid all my cards before you— You realize what this means?"

"Yes," Quirl replied soberly. "It means you will never dare to let me be ransomed nor to free me among your selected people. It means—death!"

"Not death! I will parole you."

Quirl felt an overmastering surge of sympathy. He saw this pirate as later historians have come to see him—a man of lofty and noble purpose who was made the victim of shrewder, meaner minds in the most despicable interplanetary imbroglio ever to disgrace a solar system. The thought of his own fate, should he refuse the offer, did not depress Quirl as much as the necessity of heaping more disappointment on this deeply wronged "man without a planet."

"Captain," he said slowly, with deep regret. "You remember the I.F.P. oath?" And at the other's flush he hurried on. "Knowing that oath you know what my answer must be. Put me in irons or kill me!"

"I know," Strom added wistfully. "Would you—if I could just once more shake the clean hand of a brave man and a gentleman—"

Quirl's hand shot out and gripped the long, powerful fingers of the pirate captain.

QUIRL was willing to compromise to the extent of not revealing anything to the other pas-

sengers, for the privilege of being kept in the prison hold rather than in solitary confinement. Here he would be under the vigilant eye of a guard, with possibly less chance of effecting an escape in some way, but he felt a great desire to be near the girl Lenore, and to know that she was safe and in good spirits.

They fastened him by means of a light chain and hoop that locked around his waist to a staple set in the floor near one wall. The other prisoners regarded him as a hero, for since the day of the epic fight the mate had kept away, and they had been treated with tolerable decency. Quirl was able to cheer them up with predictions that the most of them would be eligible to ransom. But as he looked at the pale beauty of Lenore he felt grave misgivings, for he knew that a man of Strom's discernment would want her for his projected Utopia without question.

She did not speak to him while the hero-worshipping crowd were fluttering about him to their heart's content. When they finally left him alone she came up to him silently, and sat on the floor beside him.

"I want to thank you," she said quietly, clearly, "for what you did for me and my brother, Mr. —"

"Finner. Quirl Finner. I have thought of you as Lenore, and wondered how you were. How long has it been since they took me out? You see—" he grinned, "I was asleep."

"Five days. At least, they turned off the lights five times for the sleeping periods."

"The man who fought for you—how is he?"

"My brother—is dead!"

Quirl looked away so that he should not see the quick tears springing to her eyes. But a few moments later he felt her cool hand on his scarred forehead, and she was smiling bravely.

"Tragedies such as these, Quirl, were common in the lives of our ancestors. They were able to bear them, and we can bear them. All his life my poor brother has lived as a gentleman, sheltered, protected by class barriers. When he died of pneumonia caused by the jagged end of a broken rib—so Dr. Stoddard says—I think he had a lively sense of satisfaction that he should end in such a way. If it had not been for me—"

SHE came to him often, after that, to sit quietly by his side, and to bring his food to him from the big community bowl which even the most fastidious of the prisoners had come to look forward to. She told of her life as the daughter of a capitalist who owned large mine holdings on Titan. It would be about time for the *Celestia* to reach Titan, and her non-arrival would be causing anxiety to Lenore's father awaiting her there. The void would be swarming with I.F.P. patrols, but as the pirate ship was invisible nothing would be found but the mysteriously looted and abandoned *Celestia*.

There was no longer any reason for concealing from her the fact that he himself was a member of the I.F.P., and Quirl told Lenore of the adventurous life he and his companions had led. Of forays to faraway and as yet undisciplined Pluto, of tropical Venus and Mercury, where the rains never cease, of the hostile and almost unknown planet of Aryl, within the orbit of Mercury, where no man has ever seen a true image of the landscape because of the stupendous and never-ending mirages.

As time passed they were drawn together by the bonds of propinquity and mutual interest—this obscure police officer and the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the solar system. But Quirl did not name his love, for always there was the grim present of their captivity, the ghastly uncertainty of the future.

The little "galley boy" Sorko

seemed daily more frail. Apparently the fall he had sustained had done him some internal injury. Often the guard, with many a ribald comment, had to help him get his emptied bowl back up the ladder.

ONE day he seemed overcome by great weakness. Staggering, he held his hand to his sweat-dewed forehead. Erratically he waltzed across the floor, to crumple in a heap where Quirl and the girl were sitting. Moved by compassion, Lenore composed his body in a more comfortable position, and with a bit of handkerchief moistened the pirate's wrinkled, old-young face with some of Quirl's drinking water. The guard looked on indifferently.

"Guard!" Quirl shouted. "He's going to die. Come and take him to the lazaret."

"Sez you!" returned the guard callously. "Me, I stay on post till relieved. Sorko'll be all right. He's been throwin' them fits right regular."

Sorko's lips moved feebly, and Lenore bent down to catch his words. They were barely audible;

"I'm all right, lady. You done me a good turn when you made Gore put me down, and I'm doin' you one now. I wouldn't do this for no one else." He gasped.

"Water!" Lenore exclaimed sharply, and Quirl handed her the rest of his cup.

"Ain't water he wants," the amused guard observed. "The blighter's playin' for a good chew of merclite!"*

"I ain't as bad as I'm makin' out," Sorko whispered. "Got to do it to tell you this, 'cause you was square with me. Gore is fixin' to have a mut'ny. Kill captain, kill all these dubs here —this guy of yourn, too. He wants to take you for his—" the weazened little face twisted in unwonted shy delicacy—"take you for him, pretty lady. I don't want him to. I'm not—a—bad feller—"

"What the hell, Sorko!" the puzzled guard exclaimed over the delay. "You bandy-legged rat, get up there, or I'll give you a jolt."

Lenore looked up, indignant.

"You heartless wretch! Would you let this man—"

"Comin'!" Sorko was scrambling to his feet, shuffling to the table, where he retrieved his bowl. Quirl and Lenore watched his painful progress up the ladder, until at last he disappeared into the passage.

"Quirl," she murmured, as her hand sought his, "take this."

He felt a small bit of metal, and looking at it cautiously, saw that he had a rough key, filed out of a piece of flat metal.

"The key to that hoop around your waist. He copied it from the one the captain has, I suppose."

HIS hopes high all at once, Quirl sought the compact little lock in the small of his back. It took a long time to get the key in, and then it would not turn. It had been unskillfully made, and was probably not a true reproduction. Nevertheless, by constant effort, he succeeded at last in turning it, and was awarded by hearing a faint click. He tested the hoop, felt it slip, and knew that at any time he chose he could free himself.

"Lenore, dear," he told her. "Go with the other women now. We must do nothing to make the guard suspicious. We don't know when this mutiny is to come off, but we are close to Saturn now; it can't be long. Go now."

"Good-by, dear. Be careful!"

It seemed an eternity until the emanation disk became dim and went out and the prisoners made sleepy

*Merclite, a highly stimulating gum. It was prohibited by interplanetary proclamation, but was always obtainable through the surreptitious channels of a highly profitable traffic.

sounds. A relief guard took station, and the ship became silent, so that one could hear the rumbling of the propelling rockets. As there were no ports in this hold, there was no light whatever except the faint glow that came from the central passage above the platform. Against this the pirate was outlined as he sat on his stool. As Quirl's eyes became accustomed to the darkness he could see the play of faint highlights on his muscular torso, and so he waited.

He thought over the situation. The safest and easiest course would be to create such a disturbance that Captain Strom would be attracted to the scene. This would probably not involve anything more than a severe beating for himself, and he would then find opportunity to acquaint Strom with the projected mutiny somehow. That Strom would know how to deal with it he never doubted. Lenore might then still be forcibly impressed as a citizen of Strom's new planet, but at least she would not be exposed to the infinitely worse fate of becoming the plaything of Gore and his villainous crew.

THE flaw of this plan was that Quirl himself would still be under practical sentence of death. Strom would not let his gratitude carry him so far as to release a man who knew as much as Quirl did, and who would not promise to keep his secrets.

The preferable, though far more dangerous course was to strike before the mutineers could. Quirl knew something about the structure of the ship. It was built around the tubular passage, and every hold or group of rooms opened on this well, from the bow where the navigators were to the stern where the rockets were located. Somewhere there would be a generating room where the invisibility field was being produced. If he could find this and wreck the generators one of the I.F.P. ships with which this part of space doubtless swarmed, would sight them, and after that everything was in the hands of fate.

Quirl nervously waited for the guard to nod. At any moment he expected to hear a hellish bedlam break loose—the beginning of the mutiny. And the guard seemed alert. There was nothing to do but take a chance.

Quirl sighed as if he were turning in his sleep, so that the clink of the released chain would not seem out of place. The guard did not stir. Slowly, very slowly, Quirl crept across the floor. He had been robbed of all his clothing except his torn silk trousers; and his boots were gone, so he was able to move as quietly as a cat.

With tense silence he ascended the ladder, praying that his weight would not send up a warning vibration. But his luck held. He was nearly at the top before it broke.

"Take him off! Take him off!" It was an eery, strangled shriek from one of the male prisoners in the throes of a nightmare. With a startled curse the guard thudded to his feet, peered tensely into the darkness, his weapon sending twin milky beams of the powerful ionizing ray toward the source of the sound.

THE dreamer had awakened, still gasping in the grip of fear, and other disturbed sleepers were grumbling.

"Better go easy, you fools," the pirate warned them. "Yer just in luck that I didn't let loose a couple bolts on ye. Got a good notion to do it, anyway." He played the dangerous little spots of light around, amused as the prisoners scrambled for safety, but with no real intention of releasing the deadly electric charge along the paths provided for it. This cruel pleasure cost him his life. As he turned his back Quirl leaped. His iron-hard forearm rose and fell, and the edge of his hand came down on

the back of the pirate's thick neck. There was a muffled crack and he slumped to the platform grating.

Quickly the officer stripped off the man's harness and buckled it around his own naked chest. The electrogun had been uninjured, and hooked to the belt was also the riot club, a truly appalling thing at close quarters. Quirl carried the body down, laid it prone in the corner he had occupied, snapped on the waistlock, and threw a ragged old blanket over the hairy legs. In the forthcoming disturbance, if anyone looked in, he would think the inert form a sleeping prisoner, and that the guard had deserted post.

Quirl had feared an outbreak among the prisoners, but they were so apathetic that they paid little attention. Perhaps they thought it was Quirl who had been killed, and he did not dare even a whispered farewell to the girl he knew was watching somewhere in the darkness.

Much to Quirl's delight, the long, tubular passage was deserted. Here the centrifugal gravity was less than it had been in the hold. A weird place, this central tube, where every direction was down, and a man could walk on his ceiling, his floor, his walls with equal facility. No top nor bottom—just a long, smooth tube with numerous enigmatic doors leading to—where?

At least it was easy to tell where the bow of the ship was. A light shone through a transom over the door to the navigating room. Should he try to hold up the navigating officer? He decided against that. There would be at least three men in there, and it was the custom to keep those quarters locked.

"If only I knew where they generate the invisibility field!" he muttered, as he stood irresolute.

OPPORTUNITY came at that moment. A crack of light appeared along the passage. A door was opening there. A moment later a head and shoulders showed. Someone was climbing up. Swiftly the officer ran to the place. The pirate did not even suspect anything wrong until he felt the spots of milky light on his face. He showed his terror plainly.

"Get up!" Quirl hissed. The man obeyed with alacrity. Quirl glanced down. He saw tiers of bunks; evidently one of the crew's dormitories.

He now turned to the cowering pirate.

"I'd as soon kill you as not!" Quirl snarled.

"You got me wrong, brother!" the pirate whined. "I'm with Gore in this deal. Lay off!"

"Where you bound for?"

"I have to relieve Burke at the ventilating turbines."

"Let Burke wait. Lead on to the invisibility generators."

"Oh, I can't do that, mister! I got to have a pass. Say, mister, I was just kidding about being one of Gore's men. I'm for the cap'n, yes, sir!"

"You lying scum!" Quirl barked impatiently. "Get going!"

The white-faced and bewildered pirate led the way down the tube to the after end. He unlatched a door and tried to enter, but as soon as he had dropped through to the platform he was met by a guard with leveled ionizer.

"This gem'man," he started to explain. But Quirl dropped after him and gave him a powerful shove, so that he crashed into the guard. The latter pulled the trigger, and the unfortunate pirate crashed over the platform's edge to the floor. Quirl had out his own electrogun and dispatched the guard. At the same time he felt a stunning shock. His senses reeled, but the grating had taken part of the discharge loosed by a pirate electrician at the foot of the ladder. Quirl threw his riot club and followed that up with another lightning bolt.

HE was then the only living person in the room, in which two generators hummed softly. Connected to them was a bank of U-shaped tubes, each as tall as a man, which were filled with silent livid fire. Quirl picked up a wrench and started hammering at the thick tubes until the glass cracked. Each time he was engulfed by a wave of heat, and the tube became black. The great generators idled and automatically came to a stop. Quirl was certain now that the pirate ship would be visible, but the position of the captives was still desperate. He hoped that none of the surviving pirates would think of calling at the generator room, or find out in some other way that they were now visible in the eternal day of space.

Quietly he climbed back to the passage and closed the hatch. He cast about for his next move. He was looking toward the bow, but on hearing the subdued clink of metal on metal, he turned.

A dozen of the pirates were coming toward him.

It would have been useless to draw his weapon. Theirs were out and could have burned him to a crisp before he could move. Silently and with deadliness apparent in every move they approached him.

"Hope they try to capture me alive!" he thought. "What a dogfight that'll be!"

Now they were nearly up to him.

"Come along, you fool!" barked the leader of the group as they were all around him. "Sapheads like you'll give the whole game away."

Quirl could have laughed. This was evidently part of the mutineers' crew bent on their errand of murder. In the dim light they had taken him for one of their number. He went with them, meekly.

"Unlocked!" The leader whom Quirl had not seen before, exclaimed with satisfaction. He pulled the hatch open softly, and the hinges had been oiled. Quietly as panthers they descended the ladder. They stood at the bottom. Still another door barred the way. Quirl now realized that they were attacking the captain's quarters. But the leader produced a key, and silently swung the door open.

"So, you dogs! You've come!"

LIKE an infuriated bull Captain Strom charged them, a riot club in each hand. He could have killed them all with a ray, but he chose to vent in physical action his consuming anger at their treachery, which he had in some way anticipated. Three or four went sprawling under his mighty blows. The others sought shelter behind tables and chests, and began stabbing at him with their electroguns. Electricity crackled, and the air became pungent with ozone. A pair of the twin rays struck the captain's gold braid, and he went down. With a triumphant yell a man dashed at him, murderous club upraised. But Quirl was faster, and the pirate fell dead with a crushed skull.

Strom was up again, fighting beside Quirl. The pirates remaining fell under their furious blows, and the two dashed out. Strom said nothing, and Quirl was not sure that he had been recognized. The captain charged straight for the navigating bow. Here, unless he should be attacked by the I.F.P. he could still control the situation. He was perhaps still ignorant of the ship's visibility.

But Quirl made for the prisoners' hold. They would be cowering there, probably in darkness, not knowing what was going on. It was his intention to rally them, provide them with the weapons of the fallen pirates, and so be in a position to advantageously make terms with whoever was victorious in this battle.

He saw, as he approached that the light was on. He was hardly a dozen feet away when the door was darkened. Quirl did not have to hear her cry to know that Gore had Lenore.

RUNNING with remarkable speed, the mate carried his prize toward the after end of the tube. A hatch stood open there, and he dropped through, slamming it after him.

Quirl picked up a bar that someone had dropped. It was but a matter of moments to break the lock and pull open the hatch. The hold was lighted, and empty. In its middle, holding the helpless Lenore, stood Gore, the electrogun in his hand covering the platform.

"Boy scout to the rescue again!" Gore sneered. He was even more repulsive than before, with the marks Quirl had left on him in the last battle. But he was fearless and utterly reckless. "Well, m'lad, I know when I'm done. And when a fellow's done he don't care what happens. So here's the lay: When I get out of here, I'll be dead. And *she'll* be dead, or you'll wish she was. Get it? She'll be killed, too, if you jolt me—the shock'll pass to her. And the first man-jack who crosses that grating'll get his from me. Now then, go ahead and pull! Goin' to kill us both, or leave her to me?" He laughed defiantly, like one who counts himself already dead.

Quirl tentatively placed one foot on the platform. Instantly a fat spark jumped from the metal to his foot, and sent him sprawling into the tube. He saw Strom coming toward him. He had killed his enemies in the control room and was now on the hunt for more.

"Thanks for what you did," he grunted. As a forlorn hope, Quirl explained the situation. Strom smiled a rare smile.

"That's all right," he said mildly. "Quirl, you're a square man, and I'd rather do something for a square enemy than a false friend. Oh, I can do it cheaply. The jig's up for me, anyway!"

Quickly he dropped through the door and launched himself. Gore saw him coming, and Strom's body shuddered as the bolt struck squarely. He was dead when he hit, but his great weight knocked Gore down.

QUIRL had time to jump after him, knocking the wind out of Gore before he could rise. Lenore picked up Gore's weapon, but dared not use it for fear of injuring her lover. As the two fighting men circled warily, seeking openings in this battle that must be fatal to one of them, they did not see the slight, shadowy figure that dropped down to them. There was a flash, and Gore slumped, a knife in his back.

"I done it! I done for him!" chattered Sorko. "The dirty, lousy—"

"Come, Lenore, let's get up to the bow before the pirates think of it." They dashed up the ladder. Some more of the disks were out, and it was nearly dark. Three sinewy forms pounced on Quirl the moment he entered the passage. The girl, too, was caught, though she fought and bit.

"Lights! Let's have some lights!" commanded an authoritative voice.

"Coming, sir!" came a far-away answer.

The passage became bright, and Quirl looked into the faces of his captors, in the uniforms of the I.F.P.

"Got you, you dirty pirate!" gloated the husky young man on his chest.

"Mike!" Quirl gasped, "don't you know me? How'd you get here?"

"Dog-gone! Finner! Leggo his legs, you eggs."

"Trailed you," he added. "Glommed our magnets on the navigating bow. Expected a fight, but some big guy let us in through an airlock. Well, he'd done plenty of scrapping—all the clothes torn off him. Half a dozen dead pirates in there. Who is he?"

Quirl thought of the stiffening body of Lieutenant Burroughs, alias Captain Strom, who had just purchased his life and that of Lenore at the cost of his own. Was his unde-

served shame now to follow him to his grave? Quirl was no lawyer, and he decided not to take any chances with the law's mercy. He said;

"I don't know his name. A prisoner from some other ship, I think. He was very homesick for Earth, and I'll see he gets a decent grave on Earth. He died to save me."

"As for the lady," he added, "let her go. She's a captive. And, anyway, I think she is the future Mrs. Quirl Finner."

She smiled, and the men of the Force looked somewhat enviously at Quirl.

"Say," Quirl said, taking Lenore's hand and anxious to be rid of them, "if you find a little monkey-faced guy down in that hold, go easy with him. He's a good man, too, and I'm going to recommend his pardon."

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

HAWK CARSE

A Complete Novelette Relating One of the Exploits of the Greatest of All Space Adventurers

***By* Anthony Gilmore**

BROOD OF THE DARK MOON

The Thrilling Conclusion of the Current Novel

***By* Charles Willard Diffin**

RAIDERS INVISIBLE

An Exciting War Story

***By* D. W. Hall**

GIANTS ON THE EARTH

Beginning an Outstanding New Two-Part Novel

***By* Capt. S. P. Meek**

—And Others!

I looked into the face of a girl about to be bled.

The Heads of Apex

By Francis Flagg

JUSTUS MILES was sitting on a bench in the park, down at the heels, hungry, desperate, when a gust of wind whirled a paper to his feet. It was the advertising section of the *New York Times*. Apathetically, he picked it up, knowing from the past weeks' experience that few or no jobs were being advertised. Then with a start he sat up, for in the center of the page, encased in a small box and printed in slightly larger type than the ordinary advertisement, he read the following words: "Wanted: Soldier of Fortune, young, healthy; must have good credentials. Apply 222 Reuter Place, between two and four." It was to-day's advertising section he was scanning, and the hour not yet one.

Far under the sea-floor Solino's submarine carries two American soldiers of fortune to startling adventure among the Vampire Heads of Apex.

Reuter Place was some distance away, he knew, a good hour's walk on hard pavement and through considerable heat. But, he had made forced marches in Sonora as badly shod and on even an emptier stomach. For Justus Miles, though he might not have looked it, was a bona fide soldier of fortune, stranded in New York. Five feet, eight in height, he was, loose and rangy in build, and with deceptively mild blue eyes. He had fought through the World War, served under Kemal Pasha in Turkey, helped the Riffs in Morocco, filibustered in South America and handled a machine-gun for revolutionary forces in Mexico. Surely, he thought grimly, if anyone could fill the bill for a soldier of fortune it was himself.

222 Reuter Place proved to be a large residence in a shabby neighborhood. On the sidewalk, a queue of men was being held in line by a burly cop. The door of the house opened, and an individual, broad-shouldered and with flaming red hair, looked over the crowd. Instantly Justus Miles let out a yell, "Rusty! By God, Rusty!" and waved his hands.

"Hey, feller, who do you think you're shovin'?" growled a hard-looking fellow at the head of the line, but Justus Miles paid no attention to him. The man in the doorway also let out an excited yell.

"Well, well, if it isn't the Kid! Hey, Officer, let that fellow through: I want to speak to him."

WITH the door shut on the blasphemous mob, the two men wrung each other's hands. Ex-Sergeant Harry Ward, known to his intimates as "Rusty," led Justus Miles into a large office and shoved him into a chair.

"I didn't know you were in New York, Kid. The last I saw of you was when we quit Sandino."

"And I never suspected that 222 Reuter Place would be you, Rusty. What's the lay, old man, and is there any chance to connect?"

"You bet your life there's a chance. Three hundred a month and found. But the boss has the final say-so, though I'm sure he'll take you on my recommendation."

He opened a door, led Justus Miles through an inner room, knocked at a far door and ushered him into the presence of a man who sat behind a roll-topped desk. There was something odd about this old man, and after a moment's inspection Justus Miles saw what it was. He was evidently a cripple, propped up in a strange wheelchair. He had an abnormally large and hairless head, and his body was muffled to the throat in a voluminous cloak, the folds of which fell over and enveloped most of the wheelchair itself. The face of this old gentleman—though the features were finely molded—was swarthy: its color was almost that of a negro—or an Egyptian. He regarded the two men with large and peculiarly colored eyes—eyes that probed them sharply.

"Well, Ward, what is it?"

"The man you advertised for, Mr. Solino."

SOLINO regarded Justus Miles critically.

"You have been a soldier of fortune?" he asked. He spoke English with the preciseness of an educated foreigner.

"Yes, sir. Rusty—that is, Mr. Ward knows my record."

"I was his sergeant in France, sir; saw fighting with him in Morocco, Turkey, Nicaragua—"

"You can vouch for him, then; his character, courage—"

"You couldn't get a better man, sir. If I had known he was in town I would have sent for him."

"Very well; that is sufficient. But Mr.—Miles did you say?—understands he is embarking on a danger-

ous adventure with grave chances of losing his life?".

"I have faced danger and risked my life before this," said Justus Miles quietly.

The other nodded. "Then that is all I am prepared to tell you at this time."

Justus Miles accompanied Ward to his room where the latter laid out for him a change of clothing. It was luxurious to splash in warm water and bath-salts after the enforced griminess of weeks. The clothes fitted him fairly well, the two men being of a size. Lounging in his friend's room after a substantial meal, and smoking a Turkish cigarette, he questioned Ward more closely.

"Who is the old fellow?"

"I don't know. He hired me through an advertisement and then set me to employing others."

"But surely you know where we are going?"

"Hardly more than you do. Solino did say there was a country, a city to be invaded. Whereabouts is a secret. I can't say I care for going it blind, but neither do I like starving to death. I was in about the same shape you were when you applied. Desperate."

Justus Miles stretched himself comfortably.

"A spiggoty by the looks of him," he said; "negro blood, no doubt. Well, fighting's my trade. I'd rather cash in fighting than sit on a park bench. I suppose the old boy will tell us more in good time, and until then we're sitting pretty, with good eats to be had; so why worry?"

And yet if Justus Miles had been able to look ahead he might not have talked so blithely.

DURING the week that followed his employment, he saw nothing of Solino, though Ward met the old man for a few moments every day to receive his instructions. "It puzzles me," he confessed to Miles, "how the old chap lives. There's a private exit to the street from his rooms, but I could swear he never goes out. How could he in that wheelchair—no attendant. And yet he must. How would he get food?"

Justus Miles smiled lazily. "No mystery at all, Rusty. We're gone for hours at a time. What's to prevent him from phoning to have his meals brought in?"

"But I've questioned them at the restaurant and they say—"

"Good Lord!—is there only one restaurant in Manhattan?"

Yet Justus Miles himself could not help feeling there was something mysterious about Solino, but just how mysterious he did not realize—until, one evening, he stood with a half dozen of his fellow adventurers in a lonely spot on the Long Island coast and watched the darkness deepen around them. "We shall wait," said Solino presently, "until the moon comes up."

The moon rose at about nine o'clock, flooding the beach and the heaving expanse of water with a ghostly light. From the folds of Solino's cloak, close about his muffled throat, a peculiar ray of green light flashed out over the water. In answer, a green light flashed back, and presently, something low and black, like the body of a whale half submerged, stole towards the beach. Scarcely a ripple marked its progress, and the nose of it slid up on the sand. "Good Lord!" whispered Miles, grasping Ward by the arm: "it's a submarine!"

But the craft on which the surprised soldiers of fortune gazed was not an ordinary submarine. In the first place, there was no conning tower; and, in the second, from the blunt nose projected a narrow gangway bridging the few feet of water between the mysterious craft and the dry beach. But the men had little time to indulge in amazement.

"Quick," said Solino; "load those boxes onto the gangway. No need to carry them further." He himself wheeled his chair into the interior of the submarine, calling back, "Hurry, hurry!"

THE adventurers accomplished the loading in a few minutes. "Now," came the voice of their employer, "stand on the gangway yourselves. Steady; don't move."

Under their feet they felt the gangway vibrate and withdraw from the land. For a moment they were in utter darkness; then a light flashed up and revealed a long, box-like room. The opening through which they had come had closed, leaving no sign of its existence.

In the center of the room stood a mechanism like a huge gyroscope, and a plunging piston, smooth and black, went up and down with frictionless ease. In front of what was evidently a control board sat a swarthy man with a large hairless head and peculiarly colored eyes. The adventurers stared in surprise, for this man, too, sat in a wheel-chair, seemingly a cripple; but unlike Mr. Solino he wore no cloak, his body from the neck down being enclosed in a tubular metal container. The body must have been very small, and the legs amputated at the hips, since the container was not large and terminated on the seat of the peculiar wheel chair to which it seemed firmly attached.

Solino did not offer to introduce them to the man at the control board, who, aside from a quick look, paid them no attention. He ushered them ahead into another, though smaller cabin, and after indicating certain arrangements made for their comfort, withdrew. From the slight sway of the floor under their feet and the perceptible vibration of the craft, the adventurers knew they were under way.

"Well, this is a rum affair and no mistake about it," said one of them.

"A freak—a bloomin' freak," remarked another whose cockney accent proclaimed the Englishman.

"Yuh're shore right," said a lean Texan. "That hombre out there had no legs."

"Nor hands either."

Miles and Ward glanced at one another. The same thought was in both minds. Neither of them had ever seen Mr. Solino's hands. A rum affair all right!

HOURS passed. Some of the men fell to gambling. At intervals they ate. Twice they turned in and slept. Then, after what seemed an interminable time, Solino summoned Miles and Ward to his presence in the control room. "It is time," he said, "that you should know more of the enterprise on which you have embarked. What I say, you can communicate to the other men. A year's salary for all of you lies to your credit at the Chase Bank of New York. And this money will not be your sole reward if you survive and serve faithfully."

"Thank you, sir," said Ward; "but now that we are well on our way to our destination, could you not tell us more about it? You have said something of a city, a country. Where is that country?"

"Down," was the astounding answer.

"Down?" echoed both men.

"Yes," said Solino slowly, "down. The gateway to that land is at the bottom of the ocean."

As the two men gaped at him, incredulous, an awful thing happened. With an appalling roar and a rending of steel and iron, the submarine halted abruptly in its headlong flight, reared upward at an acute angle and then fell forward with a tremendous crash. The adventurers were thrown violently against a steel bulkhead, and slumped down unconscious. . . .

HOW long they lay there insensible they never knew. Justus Miles was the first to come to, and he found himself in Stygian blackness. "Rusty!" he called, feeling terribly sick and giddy. Only silence answered him. "Good God!" he thought, "what has happened?" His hand went out and recoiled from something soft and sticky. Gingerly he sat up. There was a lump on his head. His body felt bruised and sore but it was evidently sound. He recollected the small but powerful flashlight in his pocket, and drew it forth and pressed the button. A reassuring pencil of light pierced through the gloom. Even as it did so, someone groaned, and Ward's voice uttered his name.

"Is that you, Kid?"

"It's me, all right."

"You ain't hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of. How about you?"

"O. K., I guess. An awful headache."

"Can you stand up?"

"Yes."

Ward's face appeared in the ray of light, pale and blood-streaked.

"I wonder what happened."

"It sounded like a collision."

They stared at one another with fearful eyes. A collision while underseas in a submarine is a serious matter.

"Where's Solino?"

Justus Miles ran the beam of his torch this way and that, and saw that the room was in a fearful confusion. The gyroscopic mechanism had broken from its fastenings and rolled forward. Somewhere beneath its crushing weight lay the control board and the swarthy operator. Then they saw Solino, still in his overturned wheelchair, the cloak drawn tightly about himself and it; but the top of his head was crushed in like an eggshell. Justus Miles had touched that head when he stretched out his hand in the darkness.

He and Ward had been saved from death as by a miracle. Over their heads the great piston had hurtled, killing Solino and tearing through the steel partition into the chamber beyond, visiting it with death and destruction. One hasty examination of that place was enough. The men in there were dead.

SICK with horror, the two survivors faced the stark reality of their terrible plight. Trapped in an underwater craft, they saw themselves doomed to perish even more miserably than their companions. As the horrible thought sank home, a cool breath of air, suggesting the smell of stagnant salt water, blew through an opening created by the crushing of the plates in the vessel's hull—an opening larger than the body of a man. Miles and Ward stared at it with puzzled eyes. With such a hole in her hull, the boat should have been admitting water and not air. However, they approached the gap and examined it with their torches.

"Here goes," Ward said after a moment's hesitation, and clambered through the opening, followed by his friend. When they were able to make out their surroundings, they saw that they were in a vast tunnel or cavern, the extent of which was shrouded in darkness. How the submarine had left the ocean and penetrated to this cavern it was impossible to say; but evidently it had come so far over a shining rail, a break in which had caused the disaster. The cavern or tunnel was paved with disjointed blocks of stone which once might have been smooth and even, but which now were disarranged by time and slimy with dampness and seagrowths. In the clammy air Miles involuntarily shuddered. "Good Lord, Rusty, we're certainly up against it! The only fellow who could tell us our whereabouts is dead!"

Ward's jaw tightened. "That rail leads somewhere; it's our only hope. But first let us get our guns and some food."

THEY were fortunate enough to discover several thermos bottles unbroken. Hot coffee revived their fainting spirits. Treating their bruises and cuts as well as they could, they left the submarine or car —it seemed to have been convertible for use either in water or on rail— and trudged ahead.

Beyond the break that had caused the wreck, the rail stretched away into illimitable blackness. Over rough stones, stumbling into shallow pools of water, the light of their torches serving but faintly to show the depressing surroundings, the two men plunged. Neither of them was without fear, but both possessed the enduring courage of men habituated to facing danger and sudden death without losing control of their faculties.

Time passed, but they had no means of telling how much, since their wrist watches no longer functioned. But after a while they noticed that the grade was upward and the going easier. At the same moment, Ward called attention to the fact that, even without electric torches, it was possible to see. All around the two Americans grew a strange light—a weird, phosphorescent glow, revealing far walls and massive pillars.

Now they could see that they were in a vast chamber, undoubtedly the work of human hands; a room awe-inspiring to behold, and even more than awe-inspiring in the reflections it forced upon their minds. Passages radiated on either hand to mysterious depths, and great bulks loomed in the spectral light. Justus Miles gave a low cry of amazement when a closer investigation revealed those bulks to be the wrecks of mighty and intricate machines, the use of which it was vain to conjecture. He looked at Ward.

"Solino spoke of a city down in the ocean. Can this be it?"

Ward shook his head. "Everything here is old, abandoned. Look—what is that?"

THE figure of a giant creature, carved either from stone or marble and encrusted with phosphorous, stood lowering in their path. It was that of a winged beast with a human head. Its features were negroid in character; and so malignant was the expression of the staring face, so lifelike the execution of the whole statue, that a chill of fear ran through their veins. It was in Ward's mind that this gigantic carving was akin to the ones he had seen in Egypt, and as old, if not older.

Beyond the statue the rail curved and the grade leveled; and, rounding the bend, they were amazed to come upon a sort of "yard" where the rail stopped. In that enclosure, on several sidings, were submarine cars similar to the wrecked one they had abandoned. But that was not the sight which brought them to a breathless halt. Beyond the sidings stood what appeared to be a small building of gleaming crystal.

After a moment of breathless wonder they cautiously approached the bizarre structure. No dampness or phosphorus impaired the clarity of its walls. The material composing them felt vibrantly warm to the touch. It was not glass, yet it was possible to look without difficulty into the interior of the building, which appeared to be one large room containing nothing but a central device not unlike the filaments of an electric bulb. In fact, the whole building, viewed from the outside, reminded the two adventurers of a giant light globe. The filaments radiated a steady and somehow exhilarating light. The door—they

knew it was a door because an edging of dark metal outlined its frame—gave admittance to the room.

"Shall we?" questioned Miles; and Ward answered doubtfully, "I don't know. Perhaps. . . ."

But at last they turned the golden knob, felt the door give to their pressure and stepped through the entrance into the soft radiance of the interior. Unthinkingly, Ward released his hold on the knob and the door swung shut behind them. Instantly there was a flash of light, and they were oppressed by a feeling of nausea; and then, out of a momentary pit of blackness, they emerged to find that the room of crystal had oddly changed its proportions and opaqueness. "Quick!" cried Ward; "let us get out of this place." Both men found the door and staggered forth.

Then, at sight of what they saw, they stood rooted to the spot in sheer amazement. The gloomy tunnel and the sidings of submarine cars had vanished, and they were standing in a vast hall, an utterly strange and magnificent hall, staring up into the face of a creature crudely human and colored green!

THE green man was almost of heroic proportions; he was clad in but a breech-clout, and was so broad as to appear squat in stature. He carried a short club, and appeared almost as dumbfounded as the two Americans. A moment he regarded them, then, with a ferocious snarl of rage, he hurled himself upon the startled Ward and half clubbed, half pushed him to the floor. Recovering from his momentary inaction and realizing the danger in which his friend stood, Miles shouted and leaped upon the green man's back, fastening his sinewy fingers about the giant's throat.

But the latter was possessed of incredible strength, and, straightening up, he shook off Miles as a bear might shake off an attacking dog, and threw him heavily to the floor. Then the green giant whirled up his club, and it would have gone hardly with Miles if Ward had not remembered his automatic and fired in the nick of time. As if poleaxed, the green man fell; and both the adventurers recovered their feet.

"Look out!" shouted Ward.

Through a wide entrance came charging a dozen greenish giants. Miles fired both his pistols. The leader of the greenish men paused in mid-leap, clawing at his stomach.

"This way, Kid!" yelled Ward; "this way!"

Taking advantage of the confusion in the ranks of the attackers, the two sprang to where an exit in the far wall promised an avenue of escape. Down a broad passage they rushed. Seemingly the passage ended in a cul-de-sac, for a wall of blank whiteness barred further progress. Behind them came charging the greenish giants uttering appalling cries. Desperately the two Americans turned, resolved to sell their lives as dearly as possible; but at that moment happened a sheer miracle. The blank wall divided, revealing a narrow crevice through which they sprang. Noiselessly the crevice closed behind them, shutting out the green pursuers, and a voice said—a voice in precise but strangely accented English:

"We have been expecting you, gentlemen, but—where is Solino?"

NEVER would Miles and Ward forget the amazement of that moment. They were in a place which looked not unlike a huge laboratory. Then they saw it was a lofty room containing a variety of strange mechanisms. But it was not on these their eyes focussed. Confronting them in odd wheelchairs, with hairless heads projecting from tubular containers like the one they had seen encasing the man at the con-

trol board of the submarine, were all of half a hundred crippled men!

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Miles, "I must be seeing things!"

"Where is Solino?" demanded the voice in strangely accented English.

Ward saw that the question came from an individual in a wheelchair a few feet in front of them.

"Solino is dead," he answered.

"Dead?" A ripple of sound came from the oddly seated men.

"Yes, the submarine car was wrecked in the tunnel, and everyone aboard was killed save us two."

The hairless men looked at one another. "This is Spiro's work," said one of them, still in English; and another said, "Yes, Spiro has done this."

Miles and Ward were recovering somewhat from their initial astonishment. "What place is this?" asked the former.

"This is Apex—or, rather, the Palace of the Heads in Apex."

The Palace of the Heads! The two Americans tried to control their bewilderment.

"Pardon us if we don't understand. Everything is so strange. First the submarine was wrecked. Then we entered the crystal room and the tunnel vanished. We can't understand how this place can be at the bottom of the Atlantic."

"It isn't at the bottom of the Atlantic."

"Not at the bottom? Then where?"

"It isn't," said the voice slowly, "in your world at all."

The import of what was said did not at first penetrate the minds of the Americans. "Not in our world?" they echoed stupidly.

"Come," said the crippled man smiling inscrutably, "you are tired and hungry. Later I shall explain more." His strangely colored eyes bored into their own. "Sleep," said his voice softly, imperatively; and though they fought against the command with all the strength of their wills, heaviness weighted down their eyelids and they slept.

FROM dreamless sleep they awakened to find that fatigue had miraculously vanished, that their wounds were healed and their bodies and clothes were free of slime and filth. All but one of the crippled men—for so in their own minds they termed the odd individuals—had gone away. That one was the man who had first addressed them..

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "In our own fashion we have given you food and rest and attended to your comfort."

Ward smiled, though a trifle uncertainly. "We are not easily frightened," he replied.

"So! That is good. But now listen: my name is Zoro and I am Chief of the Heads of Apex. Ages ago we Heads lived on a continent of your Earth now known to scholars as Atlantis. When Atlantis sank below the waves—in your sacred book that tragedy is known as the Flood—all but a scattered few of its people perished. I and my companions were among the survivors."

The Americans stared at him unbelievingly. "But that was a hundred thousand years ago!" exclaimed Ward.

"Three hundred thousand," corrected Zoro.

They stared at him dumbly.

"Yes," said Zoro; "it sounds incredible to your ears, but it is true. Mighty as is the industrial civilization of your day, that of Atlantis was mightier. Of course, the country wasn't then called Atlantis; its real name was A-zooma. A-zooma ruled the world. Its ships with sails of copper and engines of brass covered the many seas which now are lands. Its airships clove the air with a safety and speed your own have still to attain. The wealth of the world poured into A-zooma, and its rulers waxed vain-glorious and proud. Time

after time the enslaved masses of A-zooma and of conquered countries rose in great rebellions. Then against them marched the "iron baylas" breathing death and destruction, and from the air mighty ships poured down the yellow fog. . . ."

Zoro paused, but presently went on: "So we ruled—for ten thousand years; until the scientists who begot those engines of destruction became afraid, because the serfs themselves began to build secret laboratories. We of the priesthood of science saw the inevitable disaster. Long ago we had put off our bodies—"

ZORO smiled at the Americans' amazement. "No," he said, "I am not a cripple in a wheelchair. This tubular container holds no fleshly body. Inside of it is a mechanical heart which pumps artificial blood—blood purified by a process I will not describe—through my head. It also contains certain inner devices under my mental control, devices that take the place of human hands and feet. Only by accident or through lack of certain essentials can I die."

His listeners stared at him in awe. "You mean," faltered Miles, "that save for your head you are all—machine?"

"Practically, yes. We priest-scientists of the Inner Mystery prolonged life in such fashion. I was three thousand years old when—But enough! I will not weary you with a recital of how the slaves burrowed the bowels of A-zooma and of how the masters loosed against them the forces of the atom. Suffice it to say that on an island we built our vast system of buildings—or tunnel as you choose to call it—and sealed them away from the outside world, entrance being made by submarines through automatically controlled locks.

"At about this time our experiments opened up another realm of existence, manifesting at a vibratory rate above that of earth. To this new realm we brought workers who built the City of Apex and the palace you are in. But, unfortunately, we brought with us no weapons of offense, and in the new world we had neither the material nor the delicate mechanisms and factories to reproduce them. However, for countless ages there was no rebellion on the part of the workers who, even in A-zooma, had worshipped us as gods. They were born, grew old and died, but we abode forever. Besides, in the City of Apex they were freer than they had ever been before, merely having to furnish our laboratories with certain raw materials and the wherewithal to sustain the blood supply on which our lives depend. But, of late, they have made common cause with the original inhabitants of this plane, the green men—"

THE green men! As if the words were a signal, a dreadful thing happened. Out of a far shadow leaped a lean and hideous monster. To Miles' startled eyes it seemed to grow as it leaped. Thin, unbelievably thin it was, yet swelling at the head. From between two goggle-eyes writhed a rope-like trunk. Twelve feet in the air its head towered over Zoro. "Look out!" screamed the American.

Zoro's chair seemed to jump. Too late! Around the tubular container wrapped the snake-like trunk, plucking the wheelchair and its occupant from the floor and dangling them high in air. "Shoot!" cried Zoro.

Miles shot. His bullet ploughed through the unbelievably thin body and ricochetted from a pillar beyond. Ward fired with better effect. One of the goggle eyes spattered like glass. Under a fusillade of bullets the monster wilted, giving expression to a weird, shrill cry. Zoro dangled head downwards. To drop from such a height on his skull would probably be fatal.

But the monster did not drop him. Instead, in its death agony, its grip tightened, and the Americans witnessed an incredible sight. Before their very eyes the monster began rapidly to shrink. Its tenuous body telescoped together, becoming thinner and thinner in the process, until on the floor there lay the lifeless body of a snake-like creature not more than six inches in length!

"Good Lord!" breathed Miles.

Zoro who had escaped unscathed from his perilous plight, regarded it with his peculiarly colored eyes.

"IT is a tah-a-la," he said, "and must have entered the room at the same time you did. The green men often capture and train them for hunting. When about to seize their prey their bodies have the power of enormously stretching." Outwardly he seemed unaffected by the danger safely passed and waved away several of his fellows who had wheeled to the spot attracted by the noise of the pistols. The Americans were more shaken. "Perhaps," said Ward, "there is danger of—"

"None," replied Zoro. "I know there are no other tah-a-las inside these rooms, since it is the nature of these beasts to rush to each other's aid when they scream. And as for outside attacks, the laboratories are insulated against any the insurgent workers can make. Their weapons are poor—the green men use but clubs. No, it is not their attacks we fear but their refusal to furnish us with supplies. They worshipped us as gods, and the giving of supplies was long a religious rite. But now they doubt our divinity, and, since they no longer listen to or obey our decrees, we have no means of punishing them. Spiro is responsible for this."

"Spiro?" questioned the two men.

"He whom we raised to the dignity of godhead on the accidental death of Bah-koo, causing a deep sleep to fall upon him in the temple and grafting his head upon the mechanical body left by the latter. Twice before we had done this with citizens of Apex, and how were we to know that Spiro would resent it? True, he was in love with Ah-eeda, but the physical passions of men die with the organisms that give them birth. For three years he dwelt with us in the laboratories, learning the wisdom of the Heads, and then,"—Zoro's face became forbidding—"he denounced us to the people. Though there was more or less discontent, they would never have dared defy us save for him. He told them that our curses could do no harm, that we were merely the heads of men like himself and would die if they refused to give us the wherewithal to renew blood.

"BUT this refusal of theirs is an evil thing," he cried, looking at the Americans with his strangely colored eyes. "It violates the custom of ages, and strikes at the very roots of our existence. So we held council and sent two of our number to Earth after men and weapons to enforce our demands. For years we had watched Earth, seen its myriad civilizations rise and fall, studied the coming of America to power and importance. So it was to America that Solino went, by way of the tunnel that still exists under the Atlantic—"

"And hired us," interrupted Ward, "and brought us to the tunnel in the submarine-car where we—"

"Stepped into the crystal chamber," finished Zoro. "That chamber is a re-vibrating device of certain rays and chemicals. The shutting of the door closed the switches and hurled your bodies to where a receiving station on this plane integrated them again."

So they were not at the bottom of the ocean. They were—stupendous thought—living in a new world of matter!

"Spiro suspected our plans," continued Zoro. "He isolated us in our laboratories, and, by means of a crystal tube, went through to the tunnel, tore up a section of track, and wrecked the submarine-car. But his act was only partially successful. You two escaped death; you are here; you are ready to keep faith and fight in our service."

"We are ready to fight," assented Miles and Ward. The situation was certainly an unusual one, and one they did not clearly understand; but theirs was the simple code of the mercenary soldier—they would fight for whoever hired them, and be loyal as long as their wages were paid.

"Then there is no time to lose," exclaimed Zoro. "Already our blood grows thin. You must go back to the wrecked submarine and retrieve your weapons."

"But how?"

"There is a sending tube in the next compartment."

THEY followed Zoro through lofty rooms filled with amber light until they came to one wherein were assembled the rest of the Heads. Zoro spoke to them swiftly in a strange, flowing tongue. Then he conducted the two Americans to a crystal chamber at the end of the room and bade them enter it. The vibrant light caressed their limbs.

"When I close this door," he said, "you will find yourselves back in the tunnel. Board one of the submarine-cars on the siding and proceed to the wreck." He gave them detailed instructions how to operate the car. "Then get your weapons and return. Do you understand?"

They nodded.

"The workers possess no arms the equal of machine-guns and bombs. They will be at your mercy. Remember that you are fighting for our lives and that, if you save them, your reward will be great. Fear nothing."

The door closed. After a moment there was a blinding flash, a moment of swooning darkness, and then they were staring through transparent walls into the phosphorescent gloom of the underseas crypt. Suddenly, what they had recently undergone seemed the product of an illusion, a dream. Ward shook himself vigorously. "I guess it was real enough," he said. "Let us see if the car works."

They ran out to the wreck and returned without trouble. The machine-gun was mounted for action and the gas-bombs slung over their shoulders in convenient bags. "All right," said Miles tensely, "let us go."

Again they entered the crystal chamber; again there was the flash of light and the sensation of falling into darkest space. Then, in a moment it seemed, they were stepping into the hall from which they had fled pursued by the green men—only for the second time, to be confronted by a crowd of hostile giants. "Don't fire, Kid!" yelled Ward. "It's no use to kill them uselessly. Give them the bombs!"

Disconcerted by the attack of tear-gas, the green men broke and fled. "After them," panted Ward: "we've got them on the run!"

THRILLING to the lust of battle, the two Americans emerged into an open square. They had little time to note the odd buildings and strange statues. Coming towards them with leveled weapons, the nature of which they did not know, was a band of short men—that is, short in comparison with the greenish giants. Behind this company appeared still another, and another. Tear-gas was useless to stop their onward rush. "All right," yelled Miles, "it's lead they want!"

The machine-gun spat a hail of bullets. Before the first withering blast the swarthy men recoiled in confusion. Then a second volley

scattered them like chaff. Miles and Ward were conscious of no pity for the dead and wounded lying on the pavement of yellow stone. This was their profession, the stern business of which they were masters. In France they had seen worse sights, and in Nicaragua and Mexico. They swept destructively out of the square and into a long tree-lined avenue. This might be another world or dimension but its trees looked not unlike those of tropical America.

In a short while the radiating streets were cleared of crowds and the cries of the mob died away. Miles and Ward paused in the shadow of an overhanging wall and wiped their faces. "That was quick work, all right," said Ward; and, even as he said it, the wall seemed to fall upon their unprotected heads and crush them into unconsciousness. . . .

OUT of a sick darkness they came. At first they thought they were confronting Zoro. Then, as the mists of unconsciousness cleared from aching heads, they perceived that they were in a vast hall crowded with swarthy men in short tunics, and with greenish giants wearing nothing but breech-clouts and swinging short clubs. The fierce eyes of the greenish giants were upon them, and the vengeful ones of the swarthy men. But the desire of both to rend and tear was held in check by the dominant head emerging from a tubular container mounted upon a wheelchair. The Americans stared. This was not the head of Zoro. No!

"The head of Spiro," thought Miles and Ward with sinking hearts.

They had fallen into the power of the leader of the insurgent workers!

Spiro—for it was indeed he—regarded them with pitiless eyes. His English was slower and not as fluent as that of Zoro, and his words harder to understand.

"You Americans, beings of another world, have come here at the bidding of the Heads to slay and kill for gold."

He paused. "I who for three years studied your country, learned its language, history, did not believe men of your race could be so vile."

He paused again, and Ward broke out hotly, "It is true that we came here to fight for gold, but who are you to speak of vileness? Have you not turned on the Heads, your benefactors, now your brothers, who raised you to their height? Are you not leading a revolt of the workers which would deny them the means of sustaining life? Are you not seeking to perpetrate—murder?"

Spiro regarded him slowly. "Is it possible you are in ignorance of what those means are? Listen, then, while I tell you the hideous truth. Since the dawn of our history, until the present moment, the Heads have maintained their lives by draining blood from the veins of thousands of Apexans yearly!"

The Americans' faces whitened. "What do you mean?" breathed Ward.

"I mean that the artificial blood pumped by mechanical hearts through the brains of the Heads—yes, and that is now being pumped through my own!" cried Spiro bitterly—"is manufactured from human blood. Human blood is the basis of it. And to get that blood every Apexan must yield his quota in the temple. Slowly but surely this practice is sapping the vitality of the race. But though the Apexans realized this they were afraid to speak against the custom. For the Heads were worshipped as gods; and when the gods spoke, blasphemers died—horribly."

MILES and Ward shuddered.

"Even I," went on Spiro, "denounced blasphemers and thought it holy that each should yield a little of his blood to the Almighty

Ones. Then I woke from darkness to find myself—a Head. At first I could not understand, for I was in love with Ah-eeda—and can a machine mate? But it is true that love is largely desire, and desire of the body. With the death of the body, desire died; and it may be that pride and ambition took its place. But, for all that, there were moments when I remembered my lost manhood and dreamed of Ah-eeda. Yes, though the laboratory of the Heads revealed wonders of which I had never dreamed, though I looked into your world and studied its languages and history, though I was worshipped as a god and endless life stretched ahead of me—nevertheless, I could see that the strength of my race was being sapped, its virility lost!"

His voice broke. "In the face of such knowledge what were immortality and power? Could they compensate for one hour of life and love as humanity lived it? So I brooded. Then one day in the temple I looked into the face of a girl about to be bled and recognized Ah-eeda. In that moment, hatred of the fiends posing as gods and draining the vitality of deluded worshippers, crystallized and drove me to action. So it was I who denounced the Heads, aroused the people!" Spiro's voice broke; died. Miles and Ward stared at him, horrified; and after a while Miles exclaimed, "We never suspected! We would never have fought to maintain such a thing had we known!"

"Nonetheless," said Spiro inflexibly, "you fought for it, and many people died and more are afraid. Superstition is a hard thing to kill. Already there are those who murmur that truly the Heads are gods and have called up demons from the underworld, as they threatened they would, to smite them with thunder until once more they yield blood in the temple. But I know that without blood the Heads must die miserably and the people be freed from their vampire existence. It is true that I too shall die, but that is nothing. I die gladly. Therefore, to keep the people from sacrificing blood, to show them that you are mortal and the Heads powerless to save the demons they have raised, you must be slain in front of the great palace.

"Yes; you, too, must die for the people!"

BOUND and helpless, lying on their backs and staring into the gloom of the small chamber into which they had been thrown, Miles and Ward had time to ponder their desperate situation. Spiro was delaying their death until the workers of Apex would have time to gather and witness it. At first they had struggled to loosen their bonds, but such efforts served only to tighten them. Then they had tried the trick of rolling together so that the fingers of one might endeavor to undo the knots securing the other. On a memorable occasion in Turkey they had freed themselves in this manner. But the attempts proved fruitless now. The floor of the chamber was smooth, nor could they find any rough projection on which to saw the cords.

Exhausted, they finally desisted. The same thought was in both minds: Were they doomed to die in this strange world, fated never to see Earth again? Well, a soldier of fortune must expect to meet with reverses. Still, it was a tough break. After a long silence Ward said, "How were we to know that the heads lived on the blood of the people?"

"Would it have made any difference if we had known?" asked Miles.

"Perhaps not." Ward tried to shrug his shoulders. "After all, we have fought to maintain systems not much better. There is little difference, save in degree, between drain-

ing the life-blood of a race and robbing it of the fruits of its labor."

"But sometimes we fought to liberate people," protested Miles.

"Yes, I like to think of that. Its good to have something to our credit when we cash in. And it looks," he said pessimistically, "as if our time to do so has come."

THEY ceased talking. Time passed cheerlessly. Finally both of them fell into a heavy slumber from which they were aroused by the sudden flashing in their eyes of a bright light, bright only in comparison with the former intense darkness. "What's that!" cried Ward, startled.

"S-sh," said a soft voice warningly, and when their eyes became accustomed to the illumination, they were amazed to perceive the slender form of a young girl carrying a torch. She was marvelously lovely to look at, with her blue-black hair brushed straight back from a low, broad forehead and her smooth skin as dark as that of an Egyptian. Nor was she dressed unlike pictures Miles had seen of people of ancient Egypt. The embroidered plates covering the small breasts shone and glittered; bracelets and bangles flashed on bare arms and shapely ankles; while from the waist to below the knees was a skirt of rich material. On the small feet were sandals of intricate design. Besides the torch, the girl carried a slim, gleaming knife, and for a moment the adventurers were guilty of imagining she had come to slay them where they lay. But her manner quickly dispelled their fear. Sinking on her knees besides them, she said, "Do not be afraid; Ah-eeda will not harm you."

SO this was Ah-eeda, the girl of whom Spiro had spoken. Miles and Ward devoured her loveliness with their eyes; her coming flooded their bosoms with renewed hope. She continued speaking. Her English was not at all fluent, and she was often compelled to make it clear with expressions in her own tongue and with explanatory gestures. But to Miles and Ward, who knew nothing of temple training, her speaking English at all was a miracle.

"Is it true that you are men from another world?"

"Yes."

"And you came to make the people give their blood to the Heads?"

"No, that is not true. We were in ignorance of what it was we fought for. Had we known the truth we would have refused to fight for the Heads."

"Then, if I were to set you free, you would go back to your own world and not fight my people any more?"

They nodded vigorously.

"Oh, I am so glad," exclaimed the girl; "I did not want to see you die!" She looked at Miles as she spoke. "I saw you before Spiro this afternoon. Poor Spiro!" she murmured as she cut their bonds. It was some time before circulation was restored to their limbs. Miles asked anxiously, "How many guards are there at the door?"

"Twelve," said the girl; "but they are playing wong-wo in the room outside and drinking soola." She pantomimed her meaning. "I came here through a secret passage beyond," she indicated by a wave of her hand. "Now that you can walk, let us hurry." Shyly she took Miles' hand. The warm clasp of her fingers made the blood course faster in his veins.

Through a long passage they glided to another room. There were several confusing turns and dark hallways, and twice they had to cower in shadowy corners while Ah-eeda boldly advanced and held converse with occasional persons encountered, though for the most part the way was silent and deserted. At

last they came to a low door opening on a narrow street and the girl put out her torch.

"To return to our own world we must first reach the Palace of the Heads," said Ward. The girl nodded. "I will guide you there. But we must hurry: the workers will soon be gathered."

NEVER were Miles and Ward to forget that breathless flight. The girl led them through narrow and devious byways over which dark buildings leaned, evidently avoiding the more direct and open thoroughfares. It seemed as if they were to escape without hindrance when, suddenly, out of a dimly lighted doorway, lurched the gigantic figure of a green man carrying a flare. This flare threw the figures of the fugitives into relief.

"Ho!" roared the green man, and came at them like a furious bull. It seemed characteristic of his kind to attack without parley. The torch dropped as he came. There was no resisting that mighty bulk. Unarmed, and with scant room to move backward, the two Americans went down; and that would have been the end of the battle if Ah-eeda, who had shrunk to one side out of the way of the combatants, had not snatched up the still flaming torch and held it against the naked back of the greenish giant. With a scream of anguish the latter ceased throttling the Americans, clapped his hands to his scorched back and rolled clear of them.

Instantly they staggered to their feet and fled down the roadway after the light-footed Ah-eeda. Behind them the screams of the green man made the night hideous. "Damn him!" panted Ward; "he'll have the whole town on our heels!" Providentially, at that moment the road debouched into the great square. This they crossed at a run, and so, for the last time, entered the Palace of the Heads. Its wide halls and chambers were practically deserted.

Past the crystal chamber where they had first materialized into this strange world they dashed, and through the far door and down the corridor to the blank wall. Already in the rear could be heard the sound of pursuit, the rising clamor of the mob. Ward hammered on the wall with both fists. "Zoro! Zoro! let us in!" Now the first of the mob had entered the corridor. "Zoro! Zoro!" Noiselessly, and just in time, the wall parted and they sprang through, Miles half carrying the slender form of Ah-eeda. The wall closed behind them, obliterating the fierce cries and footbeats of their pursuers.

IN front of them was Zoro, his hairless head projecting from the tubular container. Ah-eeda shrank fearfully into Miles' embrace. All the other Heads were ranged back of Zoro, but there was something odd about them. The massive craniums lolled loosely to one side or another and the curiously colored eyes were glazed or filmed. Zoro held his head erect, but only with an effort, and his features were drawn and ghastly looking.

"Yes," he said in a feeble voice, "the Heads are dying. You need not tell me that you have failed. In the end force always fails. No longer will the veins of the people yield their blood to us, and without their blood we cannot live. Soon three hundred thousand years of intelligence will be no more." His voice faltered.

Miles and Ward had learned to feel nothing but horror and detestation of the Heads, but now in the face of their tragic end, hearing the dying words of Zoro, awe and sympathy struggled with other emotions in their hearts. These mighty intellects had lived before the days of the flood; their eyes filming now in death had seen the ancient empires of

Earth rise and fall. . . Sumeria, Babylon. . . . Stupendous thought; and yet in the face of death a hundred thousand years of life was of no more importance than that of a day. Suddenly Ward sprang forward and shook the fainting Head. "Zoro! Zoro! what of us? We served you faithfully and would now return to Earth."

VISIBLY Zoro made a great effort to reply. "Go to the crystal tube in the laboratory beyond," he said at last. "It still works. I have told you how to run the car. Mend the tracks. The locks open automatically and let the car into the ocean when it strikes the switch. Your reward is in. . . ." The words died away. Then, with a sudden influx of strength, the hairless head straightened, the strangely colored eyes cleared, and in a loud voice Zoro called out something in an unknown tongue and then collapsed.

Out of that chamber of death the Americans fled, suddenly afraid of its weird occupants. In time the workers of Apex would break into that strange laboratory and find the vampires of the ages dead. And in a very short time Spiro himself would die—Spiro the avenger.

At the crystal tube Miles paused. "Ah-eeda," he said softly, "we return to Earth, but I shall never forget you, never!"

A moment he hesitated, and then bent and kissed her swiftly. Instantly she was in his arms, clinging to him passionately.

"I too," she cried; "I too!"

"She means," said Ward, "that she wants to go back with us. What do you say?"

"God knows I am tempted to take her," said Miles; "but would it be right? What does she know of Earth?"

"Nothing," said Ward; "but I believe she loves you. And have you thought that after helping us to escape she may not be safe among her own people?"

Miles bowed his head. "Very well," he said; "so be it. I swear to make her happy."

So there were three of them who entered the crystal tube.

Ray Cummings
Arthur J. Burks
Francis Flagg
Sophie Wenzel Ellis
Paul Ernst
Edmond Hamilton
Sewell Peaslee Wright
Jack Williamson
Capt. S. P. Meek
Charles Willard Diffin
Victor Rousseau

—All These Great Science Fiction Authors Are Writing For Our New Weird Fiction

STRANGE TALES

Brood of the Dark Moon

Part Three of a Four-Part Novel

By Charles Willard Diffin

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

SPACE has been conquered in the detonite-driven ship of Walt Harkness, Chet Bullard, Master-Pilot, and Diane Delacouer. For the second time they are on the Dark Moon, but now their enemy Schwartzmann, has kidnapped them and threatens to maroon or kill them until Chet, having landed the ship in the Valley of Fire, smashes the controls and maroons them all.

With the aid of Herr Kreiss, scientist, till then a member of Schwartzmann's party the adventurers regain command. Taking Schwartzmann and his men from the ship, they are attacked by flying reptiles, and

Implacable is the approach of the mysterious Enemy that comes to hunt out the Earthling-intruders of the Dark Moon.

The inky waters were ablaze with fire.

the Schwartzmann party escapes, taking with them a detonite pistol and ammunition. When the reptiles are routed the ship is found immersed in a sea of green, poison gas from a newly-formed fumerole. It cannot be reached. And the four, cut off even from the ship, have they know not whom.

They set off through the jungle for a hidden valley of which Harkness knows; are attacked in the night by carnivorous plants, but are saved by a spear thrown by they know not whom.

Reaching what seems at first a natural amphitheater of black and white banded rock, they find a pyramid within it. An arrow from the jungle behind them strikes in the path ahead. They disregard the warning and rush for the pyramid. Forced to take refuge at its top they see an ape-man appear from within.

They have seen ape-men before; one of them, Towahg, saved Diane's life on an earlier adventure. But this one is different; it appears hypnotized, and Chet senses messages sent to it from some unknown and terrifying source within the pyramid.

"Bring flesh!" is the order; and the messenger takes the body of a slaughtered ape-man, but returns to select a number of others from a

great tribe that has been summoned.

They, too, are hypnotized at touch of the messenger and are driven to the pyramid top, where, at the entrance, the four fugitives are cornered. The messenger appears, and sees them. His blazing eyes stun them with a mesmeric force sent through the ape by the mysterious power back of him. The four are petrified and helpless.

Like the other captives, they are forced into the dark entrance of the pyramid, when an arrow transfixes the messenger. Chet immediately recovers his senses and rescues his companions. And then, out of the darkness, comes a wriggling, grinning, hairless ape-man.

"Towahg!" he says proudly. "Me come!"

CHAPTER XIII

Happy Valley

"TOWAHG!" Chet marveled; "you little devil! It's you who has been following us all this time!"

"I wish he hadn't been so bashful," Harkness added. "If he had come out and showed himself he would have saved us a lot of trouble." But Harkness stepped forward and patted the black shoulder that quivered with joy beneath his touch. "Good boy, Towahg!" he told the grinning ape-man.

Monkey-like, Towahg had to imitate, and this time he gave a reproduction of his own acts. He wriggled toward the entrance of the passage, peered around the edge, and seemed to see something that made him draw back. Then he fitted an arrow to his bow and springing upright, let it fly.

So realistic was the performance that Chet actually expected to see another enemy transfixed, but the squat figure of Towahg was doing a dance of victory beside the prostrate figure of the first and only victim. Chet reached out with one long arm and swung the exulting savage about. He heard Herr Kreiss expressing his opinion in accents of disgust.

"Ugly little beast!" Kreiss was saying. "And murderous!"

There was no time to lose; the sound of scrambling bodies was coming nearer from the dark pit beyond. Yet, even then, Chet found an instant to defend the black.

"Damned lucky for us that he is a murderer!" he told Kreiss. Then to Towahg:

"Listen, you little imp of hell! You don't know more than ten words, but get this!"

Chet was standing where the Earth-light struck upon him; he pointed into the dark where the sounds of pursuit grew loud, and he shook his head and screwed his features into an expression that was supposed to depict fear. "No! No!" he said.

He dragged the savage forward and pointed cautiously to the milling horde below, and repeated, "No! No!" Then he included them all in a wave of his hand and pointed back and out into the night. And Towahg's unlovely features were again twisted into what was for him a smile, as he grunted some unintelligible syllables and motioned them to follow.

IT had taken but an instant. Towahg was scurrying in advance; he sped like a shadow of a passing cloud, and behind him the others followed, crouching low in the shelter of the deep-cut step. No figures were below them at the rear of the pyramid, and Chet reached for one of Diane's arms, while Harkness took the other. Between them they held her from falling while they followed the dark blur that was Towahg leaping noiselessly down the long slope.

No time for caution now. The savage ahead of them leaped silently; his flying feet hardly disturbed a stone. But beneath them, Chet felt a small landslide of rubble that came with them in their flight. And above the noise of their going came a sound that sped them on—the rising shout of wonder from the unseen multitude in front, and a chorus of animal cries from the pyramid's top.

Chet saw a blot of black figures at the top of the slope just as they felt firm ground beneath their feet. They followed where Towahg led in a swift race across the open arena toward the great steps at the rear. Black and white in strongly contrasting bands, the rock reared itself in a barrier that, to Chet, seemed hopelessly unsurmountable. He felt that they had come to the end of their tether.

"Trapped!" he told himself, and wondered at Towahg's leading them into such a cul-de-sac, even while he knew that retreat in other directions was cut off. The pursuit was gaining on them; savages from beyond the pyramid had sighted them now in the full light of Earth, and their yelping cry came mingled with hoarse growls as the full pack took the trail. Ahead of them, Towahg, reaching the base of the first white step, was dancing with excitement beside a narrow cleft in the rocks. He led the way through the small passage. And Harkness, bringing up the rear, took the detonite pistol in his hand.

"One shell! We'll have to waste it!" he said, and raised the weapon.

Its own explosion was slight, but the sound of the bursting cartridge when its grain of detonite struck the rocks made a thunderous noise as it echoed between the narrow walls.

"That will check the pursuit," Harkness exulted; "that will make them stop and think it over."

IT was another hour before Towahg slackened his pace. He had led them through jungle that to them seemed impassable; had shown them the hidden trails and warned them against spiked plants whose darts were needle sharp. At last he led them to a splashing stream where they followed him through the trackless water for a mile or more.

The mountain with the white scar was their beacon. Harkness pointed it out to their guide and made him understand that that was where they would go.

And, when night was gone, and the first rays of the rising sun made a quickly changing kaleidoscope of the colorful east, they came at last to a barren height. Behind them was a maze of valleys and rolling hills; beyond these was a place of smoke, where red fires shone pale in the early light, and set off at one side was a shape whose cylindrical outline could be plainly seen. It caught the first light of the sun to reflect it in sparkling lines and glittering points, and every reflection came back to them tinged with pale green, by which they knew that the gas was still there.

Chet turned from a prospect that could only be depressing. His muscles were heavy with the poisons of utter fatigue; the others must be the same, but for the present they were safe, and they could find some position that they could defend. Towahg would be a valuable ally. And now their lives were ahead of them—lives of loneliness, of exile.

HARKNESS, too, had been staring back toward that ship that was their only link with their lost world; his eyes met Chet's in an exchange of glances that showed how similar were their thoughts. And then, at sound of a glad laugh

from Diane, their looks of despair gave place to something more like shame, and Chet shifted his own eyes quickly away.

"It is beautiful, Walter," Diane was saying: "the lovely valley, the lake, the three mountain peaks like sentinels. It is marvelous. And we will be happy there, all of us, I know it. . . . Happy Valley. There —I've named it! Do you like the name, Walter?"

And Chet saw Harkness' reply in a quick pressure of his hand on one of Diane's. And he knew why Walt looked suddenly away without giving her an answer in words.

"Happy Valley!" Diane of all the four had shown the ability to rise above desperate physical weariness, above a despondent mood, to dare look ahead instead of backward, and to find hope for happiness in the prospect.

Off at one side, Chet saw Kreiss; the scientist's weariness was forgotten while he ran like a puppy after a bird, in pursuit of a floating butterfly that drifted like a wind-blown flower. And Harkness, unspeaking, was still clinging to Diane's firm hand. . . . Yes, thought Chet, there was happiness to be found here. For himself, it would be more than a little lonesome. But, he reflected, what happiness was there in any place or thing more than the happiness we put there for ourselves? . . . Happy Valley—and why not? He dared to meet the girl's eyes now, and the smile on his lips spread to his own eyes, as he echoed his thoughts:

"Why not?" he asked. "Happy Valley it is; we just didn't recognize it at first."

THEY came to the lake at last; its sparkling blue had drawn them from afar off; it was still lovelier as they came near. Here was the same steady west wind that had driven the gas upon their ship. But here it ruffled the velvet of waving grasses that swept down to the margin of the lake. There was a higher knoll that rose sharply from the shore, and back of all were forests of white-trunked trees.

Chet had seen none of the crimson buds, nor threatening tendrils since entering the valley. And Towahg confirmed his estimate of the valley's safety. He waved one naked arm in an all-inclusive gesture, and he drew upon his limited vocabulary, to tell them of this place.

"Good!" he said, and waved his arm again. "Good! Good!"

"Towahg, you're a silver-tongued orator," Chet told him: "no one could have described it better. You're darned right; it's good."

He raised his head to take a deep breath of the fragrant air; it was intoxicating with its blending of spicy odors. At his feet the water made emerald waves, where the clear, deep blue of the reflected sky merged with yellow sand. Fish darted through the deeper pools where the beach shelved off, and above them the air held flashing colorful things that circled and skimmed above the waves.

The rippling grass was so green, the sky and lake so intense a blue, and one mountainous mass of cloud shone in a white too blinding to be borne. And over it all flowed the warm, soft air that seemed vibrant with a life-force pulsing strongly through this virgin world.

Diane called from where she and Harkness had wandered through the lush grass. Kreiss had thrown himself upon a strip of warm sand and was oblivious to the beauties that surrounded him. Towahg was squatted like a half-human frog, binding new heads on his arrows.

"Chet," she called, "come over here and help me to exclaim over this beautiful place. Walter talks only of building a house and arranging a place that we can defend.

He is so very practical."

"Practical!" exclaimed Chet. "Why, Walt's a dreamer and a poet compared to me. I'm thinking of food. Hey, Towahg," he called to the black, "let's eat!" He amplified this with unmistakable pointings at his mouth and suggestive rubbing of his stomach, and Towahg started off at a run toward trees that were heavy with strange fruit.

BY night there were unmistakable signs that the hand of man had been at work. A band of savages would have accepted the place as they found it; for them the shelter of a rock would have sufficed. They would have passed on to other hunting grounds and only a handful of ashes and a broken branch, perhaps, would have marked where they had been. But your civilized man is never satisfied.

Along the mile of shore was open ground. Here the trees approached the water; again their solid rampart of ghostly trunks was held back some hundreds of yards. And the open ground was vividly green where the soft grass waved; and it was matted, too, with crimson and gold of countless flowers. A beautiful carpet, flung down by the edge of a crystal lake, and the flowered covering swept up and over the one high knoll that touched the shore. . . . And on the knoll, near an outcrop of limestone rocks, was a house.

"Not exactly pretentious," Chet had admitted, "but we'll do better later on."

"It will keep Diane under cover," argued Harkness; "these leaves are like leather."

He helped Diane put another strip of leaf in place on the roof; a twist of green vine-tied around the stem held it loosely.

The leaves were huge, as much as ten feet in diameter; great circles of leathery green that they cut with a pocket knife and "tailored" as Diane called it to fit the rough framework of the hut. Towahg had found them and had given them a name that they did not trouble to learn. "Towahg's grunts sound so much alike," Diane complained smilingly. "He seems to know his natural history, but he is difficult to understand."

BUT Towahg proved a valuable man. He cracked two round stones together, and cleaved off one to a rounded edge. He bound this with withes to a short stick and in a few minutes had a serviceable stone ax that bit into slender saplings that were needed for a framework.

Chet nodded his head to call Kreiss' attention to that. "Herr Doktor," he said, "it isn't every scientist who has the chance to see a close-up of the stone age."

But Herr Kreiss, as Chet told Harkness later, did not seem to "snuggle up nice and friendly" to the grinning savage. "He is armed better than we," Kreiss complained. "I do not trust him. It is an impossible situation, this, that civilized men should be dependent upon one so savage. For what is our *kultur*, our great advancement in all lines of mental endeavor, if at the last, when tested by nature, we must rely upon such assistance?"

Chet saw Herr Doktor Kreiss draw himself aloof with meticulous care as Towahg dashed by, and it occurred to him that perhaps it was as well for Kreiss that the black one knew so little of what was said.

But aloud he merely said: "You'll have lots of chances to use that mental endeavor stuff later on, Doctor. But right now what we need to know is how to get by without any of your laboratories, without text books or tools, with just our

bare hands and with brains that are geared up to the civilization you mention and don't do us a whole lot of good here. Better let Towahg show us what he knows."

But Herr Kreiss only shrugged his thin shoulders and wandered off through this research-man's paradise, where every flower and insect and stone were calling to him. Chet envied the equanimity with which the man had accepted his lot, had come to this place and was prepared to spend his remaining years collecting scientific data that were to him all-important.

AGAIN the sun sank swiftly. But this time, Chet stretched himself luxuriously upon the matted grass and turned to stare at the little fire that burned before the entrance of Diane's shelter. His pocket fireflash had kindled some dry sticks that burned without smoke.

"We will be a little careful about smoke," Harkness had warned them all. "No use of broadcasting the news of our being here. We have come a long way and I think there is small chance of Schwartzmann's party or the savages finding us in this spot."

Beyond the fire, Harkness raised himself now to sit erect and glance about the circle of fire-lit faces. "There's plenty of planning to be done," he said. "There is the matter of defense; we must build a barricade of some sort. As for shelter, we must remember that we will be here a long time and that we might as well face it. We will need to build some serviceable shelters. Then, what about clothes? These we are wearing are none the better for the trip through the jungle; they won't last forever. We've got to learn—Lord! we've got to learn so many things!"

And the first of many councils was begun.

CHAPTER XIV

A Bag of Green Gas

UNDER a tree on the edge of the open ground a notched stick hung. Six sharply cut V's showed red through the white bark, then one that was deeper; another six and another deep cut; more of them until the stick was full: so passed the little days.

"Some time," Herr Kreiss had promised, "I shall determine with accuracy the length of our Dark Moon days; then we will convert these crude records into Earth time. It is good that we should not lose our knowledge of the days on Earth." He made a ceremony each morning of the cutting of another notch.

Chet, too, had a bit of daily routine that was never neglected. Each sunrise found him on the high divide; each morning he watched for the glint and sparkle of sunlight as it flashed from a metal ship; and each morning the reflected light came to him tinged with green, until he knew at last that it might never be different. The poisonous fumes filled the pocket at the end of the valley where the great ship rested. She was indeed at the bottom of a sea.

Back at camp were other signs of the passing days. Around the top of the knoll a palisade had sprung up. Stakes buried in the ground, with sharpened ends pointing up and outward, were interwoven with tough vines to make a barricade that would check any direct assault. And, within the enclosure, near the little hut that had been built for Diane, were other shelters. One black night of tropic rainstorm had taught the necessity for roofs that would protect them from torrential downpours.

These did well enough for the present, these temporary shelters and defenses, and they had kept

Diane and the two men working like mad when it was essential that they have something to do, something to think of, that they might not brood too long and deeply on their situation and the life of exile they were facing.

FOR Kreiss this was not necessary. In Herr Kreiss, it seemed, were the qualities of the stoic. They were exiled—that was a fact; Herr Kreiss accepted it and put it aside. For, about him, were countless things animate and inanimate of this new world, things which must be taken into his thin hands, examined, classified and catalogued in his mind.

In the rocky outcrop at the top of their knoll he had found a cave with which this rock seemed honeycombed. Here, within the shelter of the barricade, he had established what he called very seriously his "laboratory." And here he brought strange animals from the jungle—flying things that were more like bats than birds, yet colored gorgeously. Chet found him one day quietly exultant over a wrinkled piece of parchment. He was sharpening a quill into a pen, and a cup-shaped stone held some dark liquid that was evidently ink.

"So much data to record," he said. "There will be others who will follow us some day. Perhaps not during our lifetime, but they will come. These discoveries are mine; I must have the records for them. . . . And later I will make paper," he added as an afterthought; "there is papyrus growing in the lake."

But on the whole, Kreiss kept strictly to himself. "He's a lone wolf," Chet told the others, "and now that he is bringing in those heavy loads of metals he is more exclusive than ever; won't let me into the back end of his cave."

"Does he think we will steal his gold?" Harkness asked moodily. "What good is gold to us here?"

"He may have gold," Chet informed him, "but he has something more valuable too. I saw some chunks that glowed in the dark. Rotten with radium, he told me. But even so, he is welcome to it: we can't use it. No, I don't think he suspects us of wanting his trophies; he's merely the kind that flocks by himself. He was having a wonderful time today pounding out some of his metals with a stone hammer; I heard him at it all day. He seems to have settled down in that cave for keeps."

HARKNESS threw another stick across the fire; its warmth was unneeded, but its dancing flames were cheering.

"And that is something we must make up our minds about," he said slowly: "are we to stay here, or should we move on?"

He dropped to the ground near where Diane was sitting, and took one of her hands in his.

"Diane and I plan to 'set up housekeeping,'" he told Chet, and Chet saw him smile whimsically at the words. Housekeeping on the Dark Moon would be primitive indeed. "We are lacking in some of the customary features of a wedding; we seem to be just out of ministers or civil officials to tie the knot."

"Elect me Mayor of Dianeville," Chet suggested with a grin, "and I'll marry you—if you think those formalities are necessary here."

Diane broke in. "It's foolish of me, Chet, I know it; but don't laugh at me." He saw her lips tremble for an instant. "You see, we're so far away from—from everything, and it seems that if Walter and I could just start our lives with a really and truly marriage—oh, I know it is foolish—"

This time Chet interrupted.

"After all you have been through, and after the bravery you've shown, I think you are entitled to a little 'foolishness.' And you *shall* be married with as good a knot as any minister could tie: you see, that is one of the advantages of being a Master Pilot. My warrant permits me to perform a marriage service 'in any level above the surface of the Earth.' A left-over from the time when ship's captains had the same right. And although we are grounded for keeps, if we are not above the surface of the Earth right now I don't know anything about altitudes. But," he added as if it were an afterthought, "my fee, although I hate to mention it, is five dollars."

HARKNESS gravely reached into the pocket of his ragged coat and brought out a wallet. He tendered a five dollar bill to Chet. "I think you're robbing me," he complained, "but that is what happens when there is no competition. And we'll start building a house to-morrow."

"Will we?" Chet inquired. "Is this the best place? For my part I would feel safer if there were more miles between us and that pyramid. What was down in there, God knows. But there was something back of that hypnotized ape —something that knocked us for a crash landing with one look from those eyes."

The night air was warm, where he lay before their huts, but a shiver of apprehension gripped him at thought of a mysterious Something that was beyond the power of his imagination, and that was an enemy they would never want to face. Something inhuman in its cold brutality, yet superhuman too, if this mental force were an indication. A something different from anything the people of Earth had ever known, bestial and damnable!

"I am with you on that," Harkness agreed, "but what about the ship? You have had your eye on it every day; do we want to go where we could not see it? If the gas cleared, if there was ever a season when the wind changed, think of what that would mean. Ammunition, food, supplies of all kinds, and the ship as a place of refuge, too, would be lost. No, we can't turn that over to Schwartzmann, Chet; we've got to stick around."

"I still wish we were farther away," Chet acknowledged, "but you are right, Walt; we could never be satisfied a single day if we thought the ship could be reached. Then, too, Towahg seems to think this is O. K.

"As near as I can learn from his sign language and a dozen words, this is about as good a spot as we can find. He says the ape-men never cross the big divide; something spooky about it I judged. However, we must remember this: the fact that Towahg came across shows that the rest of them would if they found it could be done."

"That was why he led us so far while we waded up that stream," offered Diane. "Trailing Towahg would be like trying to follow the wake of an airship."

"And I asked him about the red vampires that jumped us down by the ship," Chet continued. "He gave me the clear sign on that, too."

DIANE was not anxious for more wandering, as Chet could see. "There is game here," she suggested, "and the edge of the jungle is simply an orchard of fruit, as you know. And having a lake to bathe in is important— oh, I must not try to influence you. We must do what is best."

"No," said Chet, "our own wishes don't count; the ship's the deciding

factor. You had better build your house here, Walt. Happy Valley will be headquarters for the expedition; we've got a whale of a lot of country to explore. And, of course, we will slip back and check up on Schwartzmann; find out where he went to—"

"Count me out," Harkness interrupted; "count me out. You go and hunt trouble if you want to; Diane and I will have our hands full right here. Great heavens, man! We've got to learn to make clothes; and, by the way, that uniform you're wearing is no credit to your tailor. If we are to call this home, we must do better than the savages. I intend to find some bamboo, split it, make some troughs, and bring water down here from the spring. I've got to learn where Kreiss is getting his metal and find some soft enough to hammer into dishes. We can't call the department store by radiophone, you know, and have them shoot a bunch of stuff out by pneumatic tube."

"That's all right," Chet mocked; "by the time you have built a house with only a stone ax in your tool kit, you'll think the rest of it is simple."

THE barricade, or *chevaux de frise* as Chet insisted upon calling it, to show his deep study of the wars of earlier days, was built in the form of a U. The knoll itself sloped on one side directly to the water's edge; they had left that side open and carried their line of sharp stakes down to the water, that in the event of a siege they would not be conquered by thirst.

On the highest point of the knoll, some few weeks later, a house was being built—a more pretentious structure, this, than the other little huts. The aerial roots that the white trees dropped from their high-flung branches were not impossible to cut with their crude implements; they made good building material for a house whose framework must be tied together with vines and tough roots. This would be the home of Harkness and Diane.

The two had been insistent that this structure would be incomplete without a room for Chet, but the pilot only laughed at that suggestion.

"It's an old saying," he told them, "that one house isn't big enough for two families. I think the remark is as old as the institution of marriage, just about. And it's as true on the Dark Moon as it is on Earth. And, besides, I intend to build some bachelor apartments that will make this place of yours look pretty cheap, that is, if I ever find time. I am going to be pretty busy just roaming around this little world seeing what I can see. Even Herr Kreiss has got the wanderlust, you will notice."

"He has been gone four days," said Diane. Her tone was frankly worried. Chet finished tying a sapling to a row of uprights and slid to the ground.

"DON'T be alarmed about Kreiss," he reassured her. "He has been all-fired mysterious for the past several weeks. He's been working on something in that cave of his, and visitors have not been admitted. When he left he told me he would be gone for some time, and he looked at me like an owl when he said it; his mysterious secret was making his eyes pop out. He has a surprise up his sleeve."

"Wedding present for Diane," Harkness suggested.

"Well, he showed me some darn nice sapphires," Chet agreed. "Probably found some way to cut them and he's setting them in a bracelet of soft gold: that's my guess."

"I wish he were here," Diane insisted.

And Chet nodded across the clearing as he said fervently: "I wish I could get all my wishes as quickly as that. There he comes now with his bow in one hand and a bag of something in the other."

The tall figure moved wearily across the open ground, but straightened and came briskly toward them as he drew near. He seemed more gaunt than usual, as if he had finished a long journey and had slept but little. But his eyes behind their heavy spectacles were big with pride.

"You have—what do you Americans say?—'poked fun' at my helplessness in the forest," he told Chet. "And now see. Alone and without help I have made a great journey, a most important journey." He held up a bladder, translucent, filled with something palely green.

"The gas!" he said proudly.

"Why, Herr Kreiss," Diane exclaimed, amazed, "you can't mean that you've been to Fire Valley; that that is the gas from about the ship! . . . And why did you want it? What earthly use. . . ."

SHE had looked from the proud face of the scientist to that of Harkness; then turned toward Chet. Her voice died away, her question unfinished, at sight of the expression in those other eyes.

"From—the ship? You mean that you've been there—Fire Valley? That you've come back here?" Chet was asking on behalf of Harkness as well; his companion added nothing to the words of the pilot—words spoken in a curiously quiet, strained tone.

"But yes!" Herr Kreiss assured him. His gaze was still proudly fixed upon the bladder of green gas. "I needed some for an experiment—a most important experiment." And not till then did he glance up and let his thin face wrinkle in amazed wonder at the look on the pilot's face.

Chet had raised one end of another stick as Kreiss approached. He had intended to place it against the frame they were building; it fell heavily to the ground instead. He regarded Harkness with eyes that were somber with hopeless despair, yet that somehow crinkled with a whimsical smile.

"Well, I said he had a surprise up his sleeve," he reminded them. "It is nearly night; I can't do anything now. I'll go to-morrow; take Towahg. I don't know that there's anything we can do, but we'll try.

"You will stay here with Diane," he told Harkness. And Harkness accepted the order as he would from one who was in command.

"It's up to you now," he told Chet. "I'll stay here and hold the fort. You're running the job from now on."

But the pilot only nodded. Herr Kreiss was sputtering a barrage of how's and why's; he demanded to know why his success in so hazardous a trip should have this result.

But Chet Bullard did not answer. He walked slowly away, his eyes on the ground, as one who is trying to plan; driving his thoughts in an effort to find some escape from a danger that seemed to hover threateningly.

CHAPTER XV

Terrors of the Jungle

TOWAHG had learned the names of these white-skinned ones who came down from whatever heaven was pictured in his rudimentary mind. His pronunciation of them was peculiar; it had not been helped any by reason of Diane's having been his teacher. Her French accent was delightful to hear, but not helpful to a Dark

Moon ape-man who was grappling with English.

But he knew them by name, using always the French "Monsieur," and when Chet repeated: "Monsieur Kreiss—he go," pointing through the jungle, and followed this with the command: "Towahg go! Me go!" the ape-man's unlovely face drew into its hideous grin and he nodded his head violently to show that he understood.

Chet gripped a hand each of Harkness and Diane and clung to them for a moment. Below their knoll the white morning mist drifted eerily toward the lake; the knoll was an island and they three the only living creatures in a living world. It was the first division of their little force, the first parting where any such farewell might be the last. The silence hung heavily about them.

"Au 'voir," Diane said softly; "and take no chances. Come back here and we'll win or lose together."

"Blue skies," was Walt Harkness' good-by in the language of the flyer; "blue skies and happy landings!"

And Chet, before the shrouding mist swallowed him up, replied in kind.

"Lifting off!" he announced as if his ship were rising beneath him, "and the air is cleared. I'll drop back in four days if I'm lucky."

Towahg was waiting, curled up for warmth in the hollow of a great tree's roots. Like all the ape-men he was sullen and taciturn in the chill of the morning. Not until the sun warmed him would he become his customary self. But he grunted when Chet repeated his instructions, "Monsieur Kreiss, he go! Now Towahg go too—go where Monsieur Kreiss go!" and he led the way into the jungle where the scientist had emerged.

CHET followed close through the wraith-like, drifting mist. They were ascending a gentle slope; among the trees and tangled giant vines the mist grew thin. Then they were above it, and occasional shafts of golden light shot flatly in to mark the ascending sun.

They were climbing toward the big divide, that much Chet knew. White, ghostly trees gave place to the darker, gloomier growth of the uplands. Strange monstrosities, they had been to Chet when first he had seen them, but he was accustomed to them now and passed unnoticing among their rubbery trunks, so black and shining with morning dew.

Far above a wind moved among the pliant branches that whipped and whirled their elastic lengths into strange, curled forms. Then the miracle of the daily growth of leaves took place, and the rubbery limbs were clothed in green, where golden flowers budded prodigiously before they flashed open and filled the wet air with their fragrance.

They were following the path that Chet had traveled on his morning trips to the divide for a view of the ship. Kreiss would have gone this way, of course, although to Chet, there was no sign of his having passed. Then came the divide, and still Chet followed where Towahg led sullenly across the expanse of barren rocks. Towahg's head was sunk between his black shoulders; his long arms hung limply; and he moved on with a steady motion of his short, heavily muscled legs, with apparently no thought of where he went or why.

Chet stopped for a moment's look at the distant sparkle that meant the shining ship, which shone green as on every other day. and he wondered as he had a score of times if it might be possible for them to make a suit—a bag to enclose his head, or a gas-mask—anything that

could be made gas-tight, and could be supplied with air. Then he thought of the bow that was slung on his shoulder and the stone ax at his belt. These were their implements; these were all they had. . . . Suddenly he began to walk rapidly down the slope after Towahg who was almost to the trees.

AGAIN they were among the black rubbery growth. It rose from a tangle of mammoth leafed vines and creepers that wove themselves into an impassable wall—impassable until Towahg lifted a huge leaf here, swung a hanging vine there, and laid open a passage through the living labyrinth.

"How did Kreiss ever find his way?" Chet asked himself. And then he questioned: "Did he come this way? Is Towahg on the trail?"

Again he repeated his instructions to the ape-man, and he showed his own wonder as to which way they should go.

The sun must have done its work effectively, for now Towahg's wide grin was in evidence. He nodded vigorously, then dropped to one knee and motioned for Chet to see for himself, as he pointed to his proof.

Chet stared at the unbroken ground. Was a tiny leaf crushed? It might have been, but so were a thousand others that had fallen from above. He shook his head, and Towahg could only show his elation by hopping ludicrously from one foot to the other in a dance of joy.

Then he went on at a pace Chet found difficulty in following, until they came to a place where Towahg tore a vine aside to show easier going, but climbed instead over a fallen tree, grown thickly with vines, and here even Chet could see that other feet had tripped and stumbled. The Master Pilot glanced at the triple star, still pinned to his blouse; he thought of the study and training that had preceded the conferring of that rating, the charting of the stars, navigational problems in a three-dimensional sea. And he smiled at his failure to read this trail that to Towahg was entirely plain.

"EVERY man to his job," he told the black, and patted him on the shoulder, "and you know yours. Towahg, you're good! Now, where do we sleep?"

He ventured to suggest a bed of leaves that had gathered amongst a maze of great rocks, but Towahg registered violent disapproval. He pointed to a pendant vine; his hands that were clumsy at so many things gave an unmistakable imitation of a bud that developed on that vine and opened. Then Towahg sniffed once at that imaginary flower, and his body went suddenly limp and apparently lifeless as it fell to the ground.

"You're right, old top!" Chet assured him, as Towahg came again to his feet. "This is no place to take a nap." A crashing of some enormous body that tore the tough jungle in its rush came from beyond the rocks.

"And there are other reasons," he added as he followed Towahg's example and leaped for a hanging tangle of laced vines. Here was a ladder ready to take them to the high roof above, but they did not need it; the crashing died away in the distance.

It was Chet's first intimation that this section of the Dark Moon held beasts more huge than the "Moon-pigs" he had killed; it was a disturbing bit of knowledge. He caught Towahg's cautious, wary eyes and motioned toward the branches high overhead.

"How about hanging ourselves up there for the night?" he asked,

and the gestures, though not the words, were plain, as the ape-man's quick dissent made clear.

HE motioned Chet to follow. Down they plunged, and always down. Towahg gave Chet to understand that Kreiss had slept some distance beyond; they would try to reach the same place. But the quick-falling dusk caught them while yet among the black rubbery trees. And the dark showed Chet why their branches might not be inviting as a sleeping place.

By ones and twos they came at first, occasional lines of light that flowed swiftly and vanished through the black tangle of limbs. Chet could hardly believe them real; they appeared and were lost from sight as if they had melted.

But more came, and it seemed at last as if the roof above were alive with light. The moving, luminous things glowed in hues that were never still: were pure gold, were green, then red, melting and changing through all the colors of the spectrum.

Living fireworks that were a blaze of gorgeous beauty! They wove an ever-moving canopy of softest lights that raced dazzlingly to and fro, that crossed and intertwined; that were dazing to his eyes while they held his senses enthralled by their color and sheer loveliness . . . until one light detached itself and fell toward him where he stood spell-bound beside a giant fern.

It struck softly behind him, and its crimson glory flashed yellow as it struck, then went black and in the dim light, on a great leathery leaf with a spread of ten feet, Chet saw an enormous worm, whose head was a thing of writhing antennae, whose eyes were pure deadliness, and whose round corrugated body drew up the hanging part that the leaf could not hold. It hunched itself into a huge inverted U and, before Chet could recover from his horrified surprise, was poised to spring.

IT was Towahg's strength, not his own, that threw him bodily down the path. It was Towahg who poured a volley of grunted words and shrieks into his ear, while he dragged him back. Chet saw the vicious head flash to loveliest gold while it shot forward to the body's full twelve feet of length—twelve feet of pulsing lavender and rose and flashing crimson that was more horrible by reason of its beauty.

Chet stumbled to his feet and raced after Towahg. The ape-man moved in swift silence, Chet close at his back. And other luminous horrors dropped on ropes of translucent silver behind them, until the ghostly white of friendly trees became visible, and they stood at last, breathless and shaken, as far as Chet was concerned, in the familiar jungle of the lower valleys.

And Towahg, to whom poison vines and writhing, horrible worms of death that had failed to make him their prey were things of a forgotten past, curled up in the shelter of an outflung snarl of great roots, grunted once, and went calmly to sleep.

But Chet Bullard, accustomed only to man-made dangers that would have held Towahg petrified with fear, lay long, staring into the dark.

CHAPTER XVI

Through Air and Water

IT was midday when they approached the heights they had reached on their flight from Fire Valley. Off to one side must lie the arena with the pyramid within. And within the pyramid—! Chet took his thoughts quickly away from that. Or perhaps it was the shrieking chatter from ahead that

gave him other things to think of.

Towahg had heard them before, but Chet had not understood his signs. And now the chorus of an approaching pack of ape-men was louder with each passing minute. That they were coming along the same trail seemed certain.

Towahg sprang into the air; his gnarled hands closed on a heavy vine; he went up this hand over hand, ready to move off to one side through the leafy roof with never a sign of his going. He waited impatiently for Chet to join him, and the pilot, regarding the incredible leap of that squat ape-man body, shook his head in despair.

"Grab a loose end," he told Towahg. "Lower a rope—a vine. Get it down where I can reach it!" And he raved inwardly at the blank look on the savage face while he held himself in check and made signs over and over in an effort to get the idea across.

Towahg got it at last. He lowered a vine and hauled Chet up with jerks that almost tore the pilot's hands from their hold on the rough bark. Then off to one side! And they waited in the shelter of concealing leaves while the yelling pack drew near and a hundred or more of them raced by along the trail below.

Invisible to Chet was the marked trail where Kreiss had gone, but these savage things ran at top speed and read it as they ran.

Were they puzzled by the sudden increase in markings? Did they sense that some were more recent than those they had followed? Chet could not say. But he saw the pack return, staring curiously about until they swung off and vanished through the trees toward the west. And in that direction lay the arena and the haunt of a horror unknown.

Yet Chet lowered himself to the ground with steady hands and motioned Towahg where the yelling mob had gone.

"We'll go that way," he said; "we'll follow them up. And perhaps, if I can only get the idea into your thick head, we can learn what their plans are; find out if Kreiss has really thrown us in their hands—led them as straight as a pack of wolves could run to the quiet peace of Happy Valley."

CHET might have followed them into the arena itself; he felt so keenly that he must know with certainty whether or not the pack would continue their pursuit. And why had they turned back? he asked himself. Had they returned to acquaint their horrible god and his hypnotized slaves with what they had learned?

But the trail turned off from the rocky waste where the arena lay; it took them west and south for another mile, until again to Chet's ears came the chattering bedlam of monkey-talk that was almost human. And now they moved more cautiously from rock to tree and through the concealing shadows until they could look into a shallow valley ahead. But before Chet looked he was prepared for a surprising scene. For over and above the raucous calling of the ape-folk had come another deeper tone.

"Gott im Himmel!" the deep voice said. "One at a time, you *verdamm* beasts. Beat them on the head, Max; make them shut up!"

And the big bulk of Schwartzmann, when Chet first saw him, was seated on a high rock that was like a barbaric throne in a valley of green. About him the ape-men leaped and grimaced and made futile, animal efforts to tell him of their discovery.

"They've found something, Max," Schwartzmann said to his pilot. "Get the other two men. We'll go with the dirty brutes. And if they've

got wind of those others—" His remarks concluded with a sputtering of profanity whose nature was not obscured by its being given in another language. And Chet knew that the obscenities were intended for his companions and himself.

Schwartzmann's booming voice came plainly even above the chorus of coughing growls and shriller chatter. Chet saw him showing his detonite pistol in a half-threatening motion, and the ape-men cringed away in fear.

"Not so well trained an army, Max, that I am general of, but if we find that man, Harkness, and his pilot and that traitor Kreiss, we will let these soldiers of mine tear them to little bits. Now, we go!"

Max's call had brought the other two men of Schwartzmann's party, and the black horde of ape-men broke into a wild run across the grass toward the place where Chet and Towahg lay. The two slipped hurriedly into the concealment of denser growth, then ran at top speed down a jungle trail that led off to one side.

THEY were bedded down for the night on the edge of the white forest; no persuasion of Schwartzmann's would have driven the ape-men into the darkness of the black trees and their flashing, luminous worm-beasts. Chet and Towahg came within hearing of their encampment just at dusk, and a late-rising moon broke through the gaps in the leafy roof to make splotched islands of gold in the velvet dark where Chet and Towahg fought the jungle so they might swing around and past the camp. Occasional grunts and scufflings showed that the ape-men were restless, and the two knew that every step must be taken in silence and every obstructing leaf moved with no rasping friction on other leaves or branches. But they came again to the trail, and now they were ahead of the pack, as the first gray light of dawn was stealing through the ghostly white of the trees.

Towahg would have curled himself into a sleepy ball a score of times had Chet not driven him on, and now the pilot only allowed a few minutes for food, where ripe purple fruit hung in clusters on the end of stems that were like ropes.

No use to explain to Towahg. Perhaps the ape-man thought they were hurrying to get through the black forest; he might even have thought the matter through to see the necessity for reaching their own valley and warning the others. Certainly he had no idea of any plans other than these, and he must have been puzzled some several hours later when Chet halted where the trail had crossed a barren expanse of rock.

Towahg had stopped there on the way down. Then he had sniffed the air, dropped his head low and circled about, motioning Chet to follow, from across the clearing where he had picked up the trail. Chet knew the ape-men would do the same unless they were diverted, and he had a plan. To communicate it to his assistant was his greatest problem.

HE stopped at the clearing, while Towahg urged him on across the smooth rock. Chet shook his head and pointed away from the direction of the big divide, and at last he made him understand. Then Towahg did what Chet never could have done.

He followed their former trail across the stone, his head close to the ground. Now he picked a bruised leaf; again he replaced a turned stone whose markings showed it had been displaced, and

he came back over an area that even an ape-man would not follow as being a place where men had gone.

From where they emerged he turned as Chet had pointed, crossed the clearing as clumsily as the German scientist might have done, scuffed his bare feet in a pocket of gravel, and pointed to soft earth where Chet might walk and leave a mark of shoes. Chet grinned happily while Towahg did his grotesque dance that indicated satisfaction, though from afar the first cries of the pack rang in the air.

They could never have outdistanced the apes alone, Chet knew that. But he also knew that Schwartzmann and the others would slow them up, and he counted on the pack staying together on the trail as they traversed this new country. He entered the jungle with Towahg where their new trail led, and drove his tired muscles to greater speed while Towahg, always in the lead, motioned him on.

There were stops for food at times until another night came, and Chet threw himself down on a mat of grass and fell instantly asleep. If there was danger abroad he neither knew nor cared. He knew only that every muscle of his body was aching from the forced march, and that Towahg's twitching ears were on guard.

THE following day they went more slowly, stopping at times to wait for the sounds of pursuit. They were leading the pack on a long journey; Chet wanted to be sure they were following and had not turned back. He left a plain mark of his boot from time to time, and knew that this mark would be shown to Schwartzmann. With that to lead him there would be no stopping the man; he would drive his army of blacks despite their superstitious fears.

The short days and nights formed an endless succession to Chet. Only once did he see a familiar place, as they passed a valley and he saw where their ship had rested on that earlier voyage.

"This is far enough," he told Towahg, and made himself plain with signs. "Now we'll lose them; hang them right up in the air and leave them there."

Another steep climb and a valley beyond, and in the hollow a tumbling stream. There was no need to tell Towahg what to do, for he led straight for the water, and his thick legs churned through it as he headed down stream; nor did he stop until they had covered many miles.

Chet had wondered how they would leave the water without trace, but again Towahg was ready. A stone where the water splashed would show no mark of bare feet. From it he leaped into the air toward a swaying vine. He missed, tried again, and finally grasped it. And the rest was a repetition of what had been done before.

HE lowered a vine as Chet had taught him, pulled the slim figure of Chet up to the dizzy heights of the jungle trees, then took Chet's one arm in a grip of chilled steel and threw him across his back, while he swung sickeningly from limb to limb, up through the branches of another grotesque tree where its queerly distorted limbs sagged and swung them to its fellow some fifty feet away.

It was a wild ride for the pilot. "I've driven everything that's made with an engine in it," he told himself, "but this one-ape-power craft has them all stopped for thrills."

And at last when even Towahg's chest that seemed ribbed with steel, was rising and falling with his great breaths, Chet found himself set down on the ground, and he patted the black on the shoulder

in the gesture that meant approval.

"Water and air," he said; "it'll bother them to trail us over that route. Towahg, you're there when it comes to trapeze work. Now, if you can find the way back again—!"

And Towahg could, as Chet admitted when, after a series of eventless days, they came again to the big divide above the reaches of Happy Valley.

And the grip of Harkness' hand, and the tears in Diane's eyes brought a choke to his throat until the voluble apologies of a penitent Herr Kreiss and the antics of a Towahg, recipient of many approving pats, turned the emotion into the safer channel of laughter.

"But I think we switched them off for good," Chet said, in conclusion of his recital; "I believe we are as safe as we ever were. And I've only one big regret:

"If I could just have been around somewhere when friend Schwartzmann found his scouts had led him up a blind alley, it would have been worth the trip. He did pretty well when he started cussing us out before; I'll bet he pumped his vocabulary dry on them this time."

CHAPTER XVII

Hunted Down

WORK on the house was resumed. "And when it is done," said Diane with a gay laugh, "Walter and I shall have our wedding day. Now you see why you were wanted so badly, Chet; it was not that we worried for you, but only that we feared the loss of the one person on the Dark Moon who could perform a marriage ceremony."

"And I thought all along it was my clever carpenter work that had captivated you," responded Chet, and tried to fit the splintered end of a timber into a forked branch that made an upright post.

And each day the house took form, while the sun shone down with tropical warmth where the work was going on.

Only Harkness and Chet were the builders. Diane's strength was not equal to the task of cutting tough wood with a crude stone ax, and Herr Kreiss, though willing enough to help when asked, was usually in his own cave, busied with mysterious experiments of which he would tell nothing.

Towahg, their only remaining helper could not be held. Too wild for restraint of any kind, he would vanish into the jungle at break of day to reappear now and then as silently as a black shadow. But he kept them all supplied with game and fruit and succulent roots which his wilder brethren of the forest must have shown him were fit for food.

And then came an interruption that checked the work on the house, that drained the brilliant sunshine of its warmth and light, and turned all thoughts to the question of defense.

The two had been working on the roof, while Diane had returned to the jungle for another of the big leaves. She carried her bow on such trips, although the weeks had brought them a sense of security. But for Chet this feeling of safety vanished in the instant that he heard Harkness' half-uttered exclamation and saw him drop quickly to the ground.

BEYOND him, coming through the green smother of grass that was now as high as her waist, was Diane. Even at a distance Chet could see the unnatural paleness of her face; she was running fast, coming along the trail they had all helped to make.

Chet hit the ground on all fours and reached for the long bow with which he had become so expert;

then followed Harkness who was racing to meet the girl.

"An ape!" she was saying between choking breaths when Chet reached them. "An ape-man!" She was clinging to Harkness in utter fright that was unlike the Diane he had known.

"Towahg," Harkness suggested; "you saw Towahg!" But the girl shook her head. She was recovering something of her normal poise; her breath came more evenly.

"No! It was not Towahg. I saw it. I was hidden under the big leaves. It was an ape-man. He came swinging along through the branches of the trees; he was up high and he looked in all directions. I ran. I think he did not see me.

"And now," she confessed, "I am ashamed. I thought I had forgotten the horror of that experience, but this brought it all back. . . . There! I am all right now."

Harkness held her tenderly close. "Frightened," he reassured her, "and no wonder! That night on the pyramid left its mark on us all. Now, come; come quietly."

He was leading the girl toward the knoll that they all called home. Chet followed, casting frequent glances toward the trees. They had covered half the distance to the barricade when Chet spoke in a voice that was half a whisper in its hushed tenseness."

"Drop—quick!" he ordered. "Get into the grass. It's coming. Now let's see what it is."

HE knew that the others had taken cover. For himself, he had flung his lanky figure into the tall grass. The bow was beside him, an arrow ready; and the tip of polished bone and the feathered shaft made a weapon that was not one to be disregarded. Long hours of practice had developed his natural aptitude into real skill. Before him, he parted the tall grass cautiously to see the forest whence the sound had come.

The swish of leaves had warned Chet; some far-flung branch must have failed to bear the big beast's weight and had bent to swing him to the ground—or perhaps the descent was intentional.

And now there was silence, the silence of noonday that is so filled with unheard summer sounds. A foot above Chet's head a tiny bat-winged bird rocked and tilted on vermilion leather wings, while its iridescent head made flickering rainbow colors with the vibrations of a throat that hummed a steady call. Across the meadow were countless other flashing, humming things, like dust specks dancing in the sun, but magnified and intensely colored.

Above their droning note was the shrill cry of the insects that spent their days in idle and ceaseless unmusical scrapings. They inhabited the shadowed zone along the forest edge. And now, where the foliage of the towering trees was torn back in a great arch, the insect shrilling ceased.

As the strings of a harp are damped and silenced in unison, their myriad voices ended that shrill note in the same instant. The silence spread; there was a hush as if all living things were mute in dread expectancy of something as yet unseen.

Chet was watching that arched opening. In one instant, except for the flickering shadows, it was empty; the place was so still it might have been lifeless since the dawn of time. And then—

CHET neither saw nor heard him come. He was there—a hulking hairy figure that came in absolute silence despite his huge weight.

An ape-man larger than any Chet had seen; he stood as motionless

as an exhibit in a museum in some city of a far-off Earth. Only the white of his eye-balls moved as the little eyes, under their beetling black brows, darted swiftly about.

"Bad!" thought Chet. "Damn bad!" If this was an advance scout for a pack of great monsters like himself it meant an assault their own little force could never meet. And this newcomer was hostile. There was not the least doubt of that.

Chet reached one hand behind him to motion for silence; one of his companions had stirred, had moved the grass in a ripple that was not that of the wind. Chet held his hand rigid in air, his whole body seeming to freeze with a premonition that was pure horror; and within him was a voice that said with dreadful certainty: "They have found you. They have hunted you down."

For the thing in the forest, the creature half-human, half-beast, had raised its two shaggy arms before it; and, with eyes fixed and staring, it was walking straight toward them walking as no other living thing had walked, but one. Chet was seeing again that one—a helplessly hypnotized ape that appeared from a pit in a great pyramid. And the voice within him repeated hopelessly: "They have found you. They have run you down."

Chet lay motionless. He still hoped that the dread messenger might pass them by, but the rigidly outstretched arms were extended straight toward him; the creature's short, heavily muscled legs were moving stiffly, tearing a path through the thick grass and bringing him nearer with every step.

DIANE and Harkness had been a few paces in advance of Chet when they dropped into the concealing grass. Chet could see where they lay, and the ape-man, as he approached, turned off as if he had lost the direction. He passed Chet by, passed where Walt and Diane were hiding and stopped! And Chet saw the glazed eyes turn here and there about their peaceful valley.

Unseeing they seemed, but again Chet knew better. Was he more sensitively attuned than the others? Who could say? But again he caught a message as plainly as if the words had been shouted inside his brain.

"Yes, the valley of the three sentinel peaks and the lake of blue; we can find it again. Houses, shelters—how crudely they build, these white-faced intruders!" Chet even sensed the contempt that accompanied the thoughts. "That is enough; you have done well. You shall have their raw hearts for your reward. Now bring them in—bring them in quickly!"

The instant action that followed this command was something Chet would never have believed possible had his own eyes not seen the incredible leap of the huge body. The ape-man's knotted muscles hurled him through the air directly toward the spot where Walt and Diane were hidden. But, had Chet been able to stand off and observe himself, he might have been equally amazed at the sight of a man who leaped erect, who raised a long bow, fitted an arrow, drew it to his shoulder, and did all in the instant while the huge brute's body was in the air.

The great ape landed on all fours. When he straightened and stood erect his arms were extended, and in each of his gnarled hands he held a figure that was helpless in that terrible grasp.

No chance to loose the arrow then, though the brute's back was half turned. He had Harkness and Diane by their throats, and Chet knew by the unresisting limpness

of Harkness' body that the fearful fire in those blazing eyes had them in a grip even more deadly than the hands of the beast.

THOUGHTS were flashing wildly through Chet's brain. Knocked 'em cold! He'll do the same to me if I meet his eyes. But I can't shoot now; Diane's in line. I must take him face about; get him before he gets me—get him first time!"

And, confusedly, there were other thoughts mingled with his own—thoughts he was picking up by means of a nervous system that was like an aerial antenna:

"Good—good! No—do not kill them. Not now; bring them to us alive. The pleasure will come later. And where are the other two? Find them!" It was here that Chet let out a wordless, blood-curdling shriek from lungs and throat that were tight with breathless waiting.

He must face the big brute about, and his wild yell did the work. Startled by that cry that must have reached even those calloused, savage nerves, the ape-man leaped straight up in the air. He whirled as he sprang, to face whatever was behind him, and he threw the bodies of Harkness and Diane to the ground.

Chet saw the black ugliness of the face; he saw the eyes swing toward him. . . . But he was following with his own narrowed eyes a spot on a hairy throat; he even seemed to see within it where a great carotid artery carried pumping blood to an undeveloped brain.

The glare of those eyes struck him like a blow; his own were drawn irresistibly into that meeting of glances that would freeze him to a rigid statue—but the twang and snap of his own bowstring was in his ears, and a hairy body, its throat pierced in mid-air, was falling heavily to the ground.

But Chet Bullard, even as he leaped to the side of his companions, was thinking not of his victory, nor even of the two whose lives he had saved. He was thinking of some horror that his mind could not clearly picture: it had found them; it had seen them through this ape-man's eyes before the arrow had closed them in death . . . and from now on there could not be two consecutive minutes of peace and happiness in this Happy Valley of Diane's.

CHAPTER XVIII

Besieged!

"I'VE felt it for some time," Chet confessed. "I've wakened and known I had been dreaming about that damnable thing. And, although it sounds like the wildest sort of insanity, I have felt that there was something—some mental force—that was reaching out for our minds; searching for us. Well, if there is anything like that—"

He was about to say that the trail made by Kreiss and the apes who tracked him would have given this other enemy a direction to follow, but Kreiss himself dropped down beside Chet where he and Walt sat before the front of Diane's shelter. The pilot did not finish the sentence. Kreiss had meant it for the best; there was no use of rubbing it in. But that thing in the pyramid would never be fooled as Schwartzmann and the apes had been.

Chet had told Kreiss of the attack and had shown him the body of the ape-man. "Council of war," he explained as Kreiss rejoined them, but he corrected himself at once. "No—not war! We don't want to go up against that bunch. Our job is to plan a retreat."

Harkness turned to look inside the hut. "Diane, old girl," he asked, "how about it? Are you going to be able to make a 'ong trip?"

Within the shelter Chet could see Diane's hands drawn into two hard little fists. She would force those tight hands to relax while she lay quietly in the dark; then again they would tremble, and, unconsciously, the nervous tension would be manifested in those white-knuckled little fists. For all of them the shock had been severe; it was hardest on Diane.

SHE answered now in a voice whose every quietness belied her brave words.

"Any time—any place!" she told Walt. "And—and the farther we go the better!"

"Quite right," Harkness agreed. "I am satisfied that there is something there we can never combat. We don't know what it is, and God help anyone who ever finds out. How about it, Chet? And you, too, Kreiss? Do you agree that there is no use in staying here and trying to fight it out?"

"I do not agree," the scientist objected. "My work, my experiments I have collected! Would you have me abandon them? Must we run in fear because an anthropoid ape has come into this clearing? And, if there are more, we have our barricard; our weapons are crude, but effective, and I might add to them with some ideas of my own should occasion demand."

"Listen!" Chet commanded. "That anthropoid ape is nothing to be afraid of: you're right on that. But he came from the pyramid, Kreiss, and there's something there that knows every foot of ground that messenger went over. There's something in that pyramid that can send more ape-men, that can come itself, for all that I know, and that can knock us cold in half a second.

"It's found us. One arrow went straight, thank God! It has given us a stay of execution. But is that damnable thing in the pyramid going to let it go at that? You know the answer as well as I do. It has probably sent twenty more of those messengers who are on their way this minute, I am telling you; and we've got two days at the most before they get here."

Kreiss still protested. "But my work—"

"Is ended!" snapped Chet. "Stay if you want to; you'll never finish your work. The rest of us will leave in the morning. Towahg will be back here to-night.

"Nothing much to get together," he told Harkness. "I'll see to it; you stay with Diane."

THEIR bows, a store of extra bone-tipped arrows, and food: as Chet had said there was not much to prepare for their flight. They had spent many hours in arrow making; there were bundles of them stored away in readiness for an attack, and Chet looked at them with regret, but knew they must travel fast and light.

Out of his rocky "laboratory" Kreiss came at dusk to tramp slowly and moodily down to the shelters.

"I shall leave when you do," he told Chet. "Perhaps we can find some place, some corner of this world, where we can live in peace. But I had hoped, I had thought—"

"Yes?" Chet queried. "What did you have on your mind?"

"The gas," the scientist replied, "I was working with a rubber latex. I had thought to make a mask, improvise an air-pump and send one of us through the green gas to reach the ship. And there was more that I hoped to do; but, as you say, my work is ended."

"Bully for you," said Chet admiringly; "the old bean keeps right on working all the time. Well you may do it yet; we may come back to the ship. Who can tell? But just now I am more anxious about Towahg. Right now, when we need

him the most, he fails to show up."

The ape-man was seldom seen by day, but always he came back before nightfall; his chunky figure was a familiar sight as he slipped soundlessly from the jungle where the shadows of aproaching night lay first. But now Chet watched in vain at the arched entrance to the leafy tangle. He even ventured, after dark, within the jungle's edge and called and hallooed without response. And this night the hours dragged by where Chet lay awake, watching and listening for some sign of their guide.

THEN dawn, and golden arrows of light that drove the morning mist in lazy whirls above the surface of the lake. But no silent shadow-form came from among the distant trees. And without Towahg—!

"Might as well stay here and take it standing," was Chet's verdict, and Harkness nodded assent.

"Not a chance," he agreed. "We might make our way through the forest after a fashion, but we would be slow doing it, and the brutes would be after us, of course."

They made all possible preparations to withstand a siege. Chet, after a careful, listening reconnaissance, went into the jungle with bow and arrows, and he came back with three of the beasts he had called Moon-pigs. Other trips, with Kreiss as an assistant, resulted in a great heap of fruit that they placed carefully in the shade of a hut. Water they had in unlimited supply.

How they would stand off an enemy who fought only with the terrible gleam of their eyes no one of them could have said. But they all worked, and Diane helped, too, to place extra bows at points where they might be needed and to put handfuls of arrows at the firing platforms spaced at regular intervals along the barricade.

Chet smiled sardonically as he saw Herr Kreiss laboring mightily and alone to rig a catapult that could be turned to face in all directions. But he helped to bring in a supply of round stones from a distance down the shore, though the picture of this medieval weapon being effective against those broadsides of mental force was not one his mind could easily paint.

AND then Towahg came!

Not the silent, swiftly-leaping figure that moved on muscles like coiled steel springs! This was another Towahg who dragged a bruised body through the grass until Harkness and Chet reached him and helped him to the barricade.

"Gr-r-ranga!" he growled. It was the sound he had made before when he had seen or had tried to tell them of the ape-men. "Gr-r-ranga! Gr-r-ranga!" He pointed about him as if to say: "There!—and there!—and there!"

"Yes, yes!" Chet assured him. "We understand: you met up with a pack of them."

Whereupon, Towahg, with his monkey mimicry, gave a convincing demonstration of himself being seized and beaten; and the toothmarks on nearly every inch of his body gave proof of the rough reception he had encountered.

Then he showed himself escaping, running, swinging through trees, till he came to the camp. And now he raised his bruised body to a standing position and motioned them toward the forest.

"Gr-r-ranga come!" he warned them, and repeated it over again, while his face wrinkled in fear that told plainly of the danger he had seen.

Chet glanced at Harkness and knew his own gaze was as disconsolate as his companion's. "He's met up with them," he admitted, "though, for the life of me, I can't

see how he ever got away if it was a crowd of messenger-apes who could petrify him with one look. There's something strange about that, but whatever it is, here's our guide in no shape to travel."

TOWAHG was growling and grimacing in an earnest effort to communicate some idea. His few words and the full power of his mimicry had been used to urge them on, to warn them that they must flee for their lives, but it seemed he had something else to tell. Suddenly he leaped into his grotesque dance, though his wounds must have made it an agonizing effort, but his joy in the thought that had come to him was too great to take quietly. He knew how to tell Chet!

And with a protruded stomach he marched before them as a well-fed German might walk, and he stroked at an imaginary beard in reproduction of an act that was habitual with one they had known.

"Schwartzmann?" asked Chet. He had used the name before when he and Towahg had led their enemy's "army" off the trail. "You have seen Schwartzmann?"

And Towahg leaped and capered with delight. "Szhwarr!" he growled in an effort to pronounce the name; "Szhwarr come!"

Chet made a wild leap for their bows and supplies.

"Come on!" he shouted. "That's the answer. It isn't the ones from the pyramid; they're coming later. It's Schwartzmann and his bunch of apes. They've followed the messenger, they're on their way, and, in spite of his being all chewed up, Towahg can travel faster than that crowd. He'll guide us out of this yet!"

HE was thrusting bundles of supplies—food, arrows, bows—into the eager hands of the others, while Towahg alternately licked his wounds and danced about with excitement. Diane's voice broke in upon the tense haste and bustle of the moment. She spoke quietly—her tone was flat, almost emotionless—yet there was a quality that made Chet drop what he was holding and reach for a bow.

"We can't go," Diane was saying; "we can't go. Poor Towahg! He couldn't tell us how close they were on his trail; he hurried us all he could."

Chet saw her hand raised; he followed with his eyes the finger that pointed toward the jungle, and he saw as had Diane the flick of moving leaves where black faces showed silently for an instant and then vanished. They were up in the trees—lower—down on the ground. There were scores upon scores of the ape-men spying upon them, watching every move that they made.

And suddenly, across the open ground, where the high-flung branches made the great arch that they called the entrance, a ragged figure appeared. The figure of a man whose torn clothes fluttered in the breeze, whose face was black with an unkempt beard, whose thick hand waved to motion other scarecrow figures to him, and who laughed, loudly and derisively that the three quiet men and the girl on the knoll might hear.

"*Guten tag, meine Herrschaften,*" Schwartzmann called loudly, "*meine sehr geerten Herrschaften!* You must not be so exclusive. Many *guten* friends haff I here with me. I haff been looking forward to this time when they would meet you."

CHAPTER XIX

"One for Each of Us"

FOR men who had come from a world where wars and warfare were things of the past, Chet

and Harkness had done effective work in preparing a defense. The knoll made a height of land that any military man would have chosen to defend, and the top of the gentle slope was protected by the barricade.

On each side of the inverted U that ended at the water's edge an opening had been left, where they passed in and out. But even here the wall had been doubled and carried past itself; no place was left for an easy assault, and on the open end the water was their protection.

Within the barricade, at about the center, the top of the knoll showed an outcrop of rocks that rose high enough to be exposed to fire from outside, but their little shelters were on nearly level ground at the base of the rocks. The whole enclosure was some thirty feet in width and perhaps a hundred feet long. Plenty to protect in case of an attack, as Chet had remarked, but it could not have been much smaller and have done its work effectively.

There was no one of the four white persons but gave unspoken thanks for the barricade of sharp stakes, and even Towahg, although his fangs were bared in an animal snarl at the sound of Schwartzmann's voice, must have been glad to keep his bruised body out of sight behind the sheltering wall.

No one of them replied to Schwartzmann's taunt. Harkness wrinkled his eyes to stare through the bright sunlight and see the pistol in the man's belt.

"He still has it," he said, half to himself; "he's got the gun. I was rather hoping something might have happened to it. Just one gun; but he has plenty of ammunition—"

"And we haven't—" It was Chet, now, who seemed thinking aloud. "But, I wonder—can we bluff him a bit?"

He dropped behind the barricade and crawled into one of the huts to come out with three extra pistols clutched in his hand. Empty, of course, but they had brought them with them with some faint hope that some day the ship might be reached and ammunition secured. Chet handed one to Diane and another to Kreiss; the third weapon he stuck in his own belt where it would show plainly. Harkness was already armed.

"Now let's get up where they can see us," was Chet's answer to their wondering looks; "let's show off our armament. How can he know how much ammunition we have left? For that matter, he may be getting a little short of shells himself, and he won't know that his solitary pistol is the thing we are most afraid of."

"Good," Harkness agreed; "we will play a little good old-fashioned poker with the gentleman, but don't overdo it, just casually let him see the guns."

Schwartzmann, far across the open ground, must have seen them as plainly as they saw him as they climbed the little hummock of rocks. He could not fail to note the pistols in the men's belts, nor overlook the significance of the weapon that gleamed brightly in the pilot's hand. Chet saw him return his pistol to his belt as he backed slowly into the shadows, and he knew that Schwartzmann had no wish for an exchange of shots, even at long range, with so many guns against him. But from their slight elevation he saw something else.

The grass was trampled flat all about their enclosure, but, beyond, it stood half the height of a man; it was a sea of rippling green where the light wind brushed across it. And throughout that sea that intervened between them and the jungle Chet saw other ripples

forming, little quiverings of shaken stalks that came here and there until the whole expanse seemed trembling.

"Down—and get ready for trouble!" he ordered crisply, then added as he sprang for his own long bow: "Their commanding officer doesn't want to mix it with us—not just yet—but the rest are coming, and there's a million of them, it looks like."

THE apes broke cover with all the suddenness of a covey of quail, but they charged like wild, hungry beasts that have sighted prey. Only the long spears in their bunchy fists and the shorter throwing spears that came through the air marked them as primitive men.

The standing grass at the end of the clearing beyond their barricade was abruptly black with naked bodies. To Chet, that charging horde was a formless dark wave that came rolling up toward them; then, as suddenly as the black wave had appeared, it ceased to be a mere mass and Chet saw individual units. A black-haired one was springing in advance. The man behind the barricade heard the twang of his bow as if it were a sound from afar off; but he saw the arrow projecting from a barrel-shaped chest, and the ape-man tottering over.

He loosed his arrows as rapidly as he could draw the bow; he knew that others were shooting too. Where naked feet were stumbling over prostrate bodies the black wave broke in confusion and came on unsteadily into the hail of winged barbs.

But the wave rushed on and up to the barricade in a scattering of shrieking, leaping ape-man, and Chet spared a second for unspoken thanks for the height of the barrier. A full six feet it stood from the ground, and the ends that had been burned, then pointed with a crude ax, were aimed outward. Inside the enclosure Chet had wanted to throw up a bench or mound of earth on which they could stand to fire above the high barrier, but lack of tools had prevented them. Instead they had laid cribbing of short poles at intervals and on each of these had built a platform of branches.

CLOSE to the barricade of poles and vines, these platforms enabled the defenders to shield themselves from thrown spears and rise as they wished to fire out and down into the mob. But with the rush of a score or more of the man-beasts to the barricade itself, Chet suddenly knew that they were vulnerable to an attack with long lances.

A leaping body was hanging on the barrier; huge hands tore and clawed at the inner side for a grip. From the platform where Diane stood came an arrow at the same instant Chet shot. One matched the other for accuracy, and the clawing figure fell limply from sight. But there were others—and a lance tipped with the jagged fin, needle-sharp, of a poison fish was thrusting wickedly toward Diane.

This time Harkness' arrow did the work, but Chet ordered a retreat. Above the pandemonium of snarling growls, he shouted.

"Back to the rocks, Walt," he ordered; "you and Diane! Quick! The rest of us will hold 'em till you are ready. Then you keep 'em off until we come!" And the two obeyed the cool, crisp voice that was interrupted only when its owner, with the others, had to duck quickly to avoid a barrage of spears.

KREISS was wounded. Chet found him dropped beside his firing platform working methodically to extract the broad blade of a spear from his shoulder where it was embedded.

Chet's first thought was of poison, and he shouted for Towahg. But the savage only looked once at the spear, seized it and with one quick jerk drew the weapon from the wound; then, when the blood flowed freely, he motioned to Chet that the man was all right.

The savage wadded a handful of leaves into a ball and pressed it aginst the wound, and Chet improvised a first-aid bandage from Kreiss' ragged blouse before they put him from sight in one of the shelters and ran to rejoin Harkness and Diane on the rocks.

But the first wave was spent. There were no more snarling, white-toothed faces above the barricade, and in the open space beyond were shambling forms that hid themselves in the long grass while others dragged themselves to the same concealment or lay limply inert on the open, sunlit ground.

And within the enclosure one solitary ape-man forgot his bruised body while he stamped up and down or whirled absurdly in a dance that expressed his joy in victory.

"Better come down," said Chet. "Schwartzmann might take a shot at you, although I think we are out of pistol range. We're lucky that isn't a service gun he's got, but come down, anyway, and we'll see what's next. This time we've had the breaks, but there's more coming. Schwartzmann isn't through."

But Schwartzmann was through for the day; Chet was mistaken in expecting a second assault so soon. He posted Towahg as sentry, and, with Diane and Harkness, threw himself before the door-flap of the shelter where Kreiss had been hidden, and was now sitting up, his arm in a sling.

"Either you're a mighty hard man to kill," he told Kreiss, "or else Towahg is a powerful medicine man."

"I am still in the fight," the scientist assured him, "I can't do any more work with bow and arrow, but I can keep the rest of you supplied."

"We'll need you," Chet assured him grimly.

THEY ate in silence as the afternoon drew on toward evening.

Back by their little fire, with Towahg on guard, Chet shot an appreciative glance at a white disk in the southern sky. "Still getting the breaks," he exulted. "The moon is up; it will give us some light after sunset, and later the Earth will rise and light things up around here in good shape."

That white disk turned golden as the sun vanished where mountainous clouds loomed blackly far across the jungle-clad hills. Then the quick night blanketed everything, and the golden moon made black the fringe of forest trees while it sent long lines of light through their waving, sinuous branches, to cast moving shadows that seemed strangely alive on the open ground. Muffled by the jungle-sea that absorbed the sound waves, faint grumblings came to them, and at a quiver of light in the blackness where the clouds had been, Harkness turned to Chet.

"We had all better get on the job," Chet was saying, as he took his bow and a supply of arrows, "we've got our work cut out for us to-night."

And Harkness nodded grimly as the flickering lightning played fitfully over far-distant trees. "We crowed a bit too soon," he told Chet; "there's a big storm coming, and that's a break for Schwartzmann. No light from either moon or Earth to-night."

The moon-disk, as he spoke, lost its first clear brilliance in the haze of the expanding clouds.

"Watch sharp, Towahg!" Chet

ordered. And, to the others: "Get this fire moved away from the huts —here, I'll do that, Walt. You bring a supply of wood; some of those dried leaves, too. We'll build a big fire, we have to depend on that for light."

WITH the skeleton of a huge palm leaf he raked the fire out into an open space; they had plenty of fuel and they fed the blaze until its mounting flames lighted the entire enclosure. But outside the barricade were dark shadows, and Chet saw that this light would only make targets of the defenders, while the attackers could creep up in safety.

"'Way up," he ordered; "we've got to have the fire on the top of the rocks." He clambered to the topmost level of the rocky outcrop and dragged a blazing stick with him. Harkness handed him more; and now the light struck down and over the stockade and illumined the ground outside.

"Here's your job, Kreiss," said Chet, "if you're equal to it. You keep that fire going and have a pile of dried husks handy if I call for a bright blaze.

"We've got to defend the whole works," he explained. "That bunch today tried to jump us just from one side, but trust Schwartzmann to divide his force and hit us from all sides next time.

"But we'll hold the fort," he said and he forced a confidence into his voice that his inner thoughts did not warrant. To Harkness he whispered when Diane was away: "Six shells in the gun, Walt; we won't waste them on the apes. There's one for each of us including Towahg, and one extra in case you miss. We'll fight as long as we are able; then it's up to you to shoot quick and straight."

But Walt Harkness felt for the pistol in his belt and handed it to Chet. "I couldn't," he said, and his voice was harsh and strained, "—not Diane; you'll have to, Chet." And Chet Bullard dropped his own useless pistol to the ground while he slipped the other into its holster on the belt that bound his ragged clothes about him, but he said nothing. He was facing a situation where words were hardly adequate to express the surging emotion within.

DIANE had returned when he addressed Walt casually. "Wonder why the beggars didn't attack again," he pondered. "Why has Schwartzmann waited; why hasn't he or one of his men crept up in the grass for a shot at us? He's got some deviltry brewing."

"Waiting for night,' hazarded Walt. He looked up to see Kreiss who had joined them.

"If Towahg could tend the fire," suggested the scientist, "I could fire my little catapult with one hand. I think I could do some damage." But Chet shook his head and answered gently:

"I'm afraid Towahg's the better man to-night, Kreiss. You can help best by giving us light. That's the province of science, you know," he added, and grinned up at the anxious man.

Each moment of this companionship meant much to Chet. It was the last conference, he knew. They would be swamped, overwhelmed, and then—only the pistol with its six shells was left. But he drew his thoughts back to the peaceful quiet of the present moment, though the hush was ominous with the threat of the approaching storm and of the other assault that must come in the storm's concealing darkness. He looked at Diane and Walt—comrades true and tender. The leaping flames from the rocks above made flickering shadows on their upturned faces.

THE moment ended. A growl from where Towahg was on guard brought them scrambling to their feet. "Gr-r-ranga!" Towahg was warning. "Granga come!"

They fired from their platforms as before, then raced for the rocks and the elevation they afforded, for the black bodies had reached the stockade quickly in the half light. But they came again from one point—the farthest curve of the U-shaped fence this time—and though a score of black animal faces showed staring eyes and snarling fangs where heavy bodies were drawn up on the barricade, no one of them reached the inside.

"We're holding them!" Chet was shouting. But the easy victory was too good to believe; he knew there were more to come; this force of some thirty or forty was not all that Schwartzmann could throw into the fight. And Schwartzmann, himself! Chet had seen the bronzed faces of Max and another standing back of the assaulting force, but where was Schwartzmann?

It was Kreiss who answered the insistent question. From above on the rocks, where he had kept the fire blazing, Kreiss was calling in a high-pitched voice.

"The water!" he shouted, "they're attacking from the water!" And Chet rushed around the broken rock-heap to see a lake like an inky pool, where the firelight showed faint reflections from black, shining faces; where rippling lines of phosphorescence marked each swimming savage; and where larger waves of ghostly light came from a log raft on which was a familiar figure whose face, through its black beard, showed white in contrast with the faces of his companions.

STILL a hundred feet from the shore, they were approaching steadily, inexorably; and the storm, at that instant, broke with a ripping flash of light that tore the heavens apart, and that seared the picture of the attackers upon the eyeballs of the man who stared down.

From behind him came sounds of a renewed attack. He heard Harkness: "Shoot, Diane! Nail 'em, Towahg! There's a hundred of them!" And the wind that came with the lightning flash, though it brought no rain, whipped the black water of the lake to waves that drove the raft and the swimming savages closer—closer—

Chet glanced above him. "Come down, Kreiss!" he ordered. "Get down here, quick! This is the finish. We could have licked them on land, but these others will get us." He stood, dumb with amazement, as he saw the thin figure of Kreiss leap excitedly from his rocky perch and vanish like a terrified rabbit into the cave in the rocks.

"I didn't think—" he was telling himself in wondering disbelief at this cowardice, when Kreiss reappeared. His one hand was white with a rubbery coating that Chet vaguely knew for latex. He was holding a gray, earthy mass, and he threw himself forward to the catapult where it stood idly erect in the wind that beat and whipped at it.

"Help me!" It was Kreiss who ordered, and once more he spoke as if he were conducting only an interesting experiment. "Pull here! Bend it—bend it! Now hold steady; this is metallic sodium, a deposit I found deep in the earth."

The gray mass was in the crude bucket of the machine. Kreiss' knife was ready. He slashed at the vine that held the bent sapling, and a gray mass whirled out into the dark; out, and down—and the inky waters were in that instant ablaze with fire.

Fire that threw itself in flaming balls; that broke into many parts and each part, like a living thing, darted crazily about; that leaped

into the air to fall again among ape-men who screamed frenziedly in animal terror.

"IT unites with water," Kreiss was saying: "a spontaneous liberation and ignition of hydrogen." The white-coated hand had dumped another mass into the primitive engine of war. "Now pull —so—and I cut it!" And the leaping, flashing fires tore furiously in redoubled madness where a shrieking mob of terrified beasts, and one white man among them, drove ashore beyond the end of a barricade.

Chet felt Harkness beside him. "We drove 'em off in back. What the devil is going on here?" Walt was demanding. But Chet was watching the retreat of the blacks straight off and down the shore where the sand was smooth and neither grass nor trees could hinder their wild flight.

"You've got them licked," Harkness was exulting; "and we've cleaned them up on our side. Just came over to see if you needed help."

"We sure would have," said Chet; "more than you could give if it hadn't been for Kreiss."

"We've got 'em licked!" Harkness repeated wonderingly; "we've won!" It was too much to grasp all at once. The victory had been so quick, and he had already given up hope.

The two had clasped hands; they stood so for silent minutes. Chet had been nerved to the point of destroying his companions and himself; the revulsion of feeling that victory brought was more stupefying than the threat of impending defeat.

STARING out over the black waters, he knew only vaguely when Harkness left; a moment later he followed him gropingly around the jagged rocks, while there came to him, blurred by his own mental numbness, a shouted call. . . . But a moment elapsed before he was aroused, before he knew it for Walt's voice. He recognized the agonized tone and sprang forward into the clearing.

The fire still blazed on the rocky platform above; its uncertain light reached the figure of a running man who was making madly for the opening in the wall. As he ran he screamed over and over, in a voice hoarse and horrible like one seized in the fright of a fearful dream: "Diane! Diane, wait! For God's sake, Diane, don't go!"

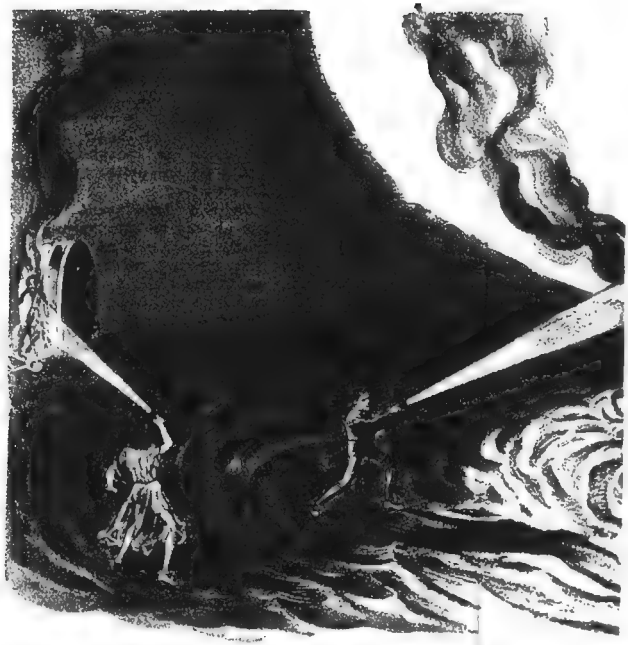
And the driven clouds were torn apart for a space to let through a clear golden light. The great lantern of Earth was flashing down through space to light a grassy opening in a jungle of another world, where, stark and rigid, a girl was walking toward the shadow-world beyond, while before her went a black shape, huge and powerful, in whose head were eyes like burning lights, and whose arms were rigidly extended as if to draw the stricken girl on and on.

The running figure overtook them. Chet saw him checked in midspring, and Harkness, too, stood rigid as if carved from stone, then followed as did Diane, where the ape-thing led. . . . From the far side of the clearing, where Schwartzmann's men had gone, came a great shout of laughter that jarred Chet from the stupor that bound him.

"The messenger!" he said aloud. "God help them; it's the messenger —and he's taking them to the pyramid!"

Then the torn clouds closed that the greater darkness might cover those who vanished in the shadowed fringe of a stormy, wind-whipped jungle. . . .

(Concluded in the next issue.)



The Red Hell of Jupiter

A Complete Novelette

By Paul Ernst

CHAPTER I

The Red Spot

COMMANDER STONE, grizzled chief of the Planetary Exploration Forces, acknowledged Captain Brand Bowen's salute and beckoned him to take a seat.

Brand, youngest officer of the division to wear the triple-V for distinguished service, sat down and stared curiously at his superior. He hadn't the remotest idea why he had been recalled from leave; but that it was on a matter of some importance he was sure. He hunched his big shoulders and awaited orders.

What is the mystery centered in Jupiter's famous "Red Spot"? Two fighting Earthmen, caught by the "Pipe-men" like their vanished comrades, soon find out.

"Captain Bowen," said Stone,

At this the titanic thing went wholly, colossally mad.

"I want you to go to Jupiter as soon as you can arrange to do so, fly low over the red area in the southern hemisphere, and come back here with some sort of report as to what's wrong with that infernal death spot."

He tapped his radio stylus thoughtfully against the edge of his desk.

"As you perhaps know, I detailed a ship to explore the red spot about a year ago. It never came back. I sent another ship, with two good men in it, to check up on the disappearance of the first. That ship, too, never came back. Almost with the second of its arrival at the edge of the red area all radio communication with it was cut off. It was never heard from again. Two weeks ago I sent Journeyman there. Now *he* has been swallowed up in a mysterious silence."

An exclamation burst from Brand's lips. Sub-Commander Journeyman! Senior officer under Stone, ablest man in the expeditionary

forces, and Brand's oldest friend!

Stone nodded comprehension of the stricken look on Brand's face. "I know how friendly you two were," he said soberly. "That's why I chose you to go and find out, if you can, what happened to him and the other two ships."

Brand's chin sank to rest on the stiff high collar of his uniform.

"Journeyman!" he mused. "Why, he was like an older brother to me. And now . . . he's gone."

THERE was silence in Commander Stone's sanctum for a time. Then Brand raised his head.

"Did you have any radio reports at all from any of the three ships concerning the nature of the red spot?" he inquired.

"None that gave definite information," replied Stone. "From each of the three ships we received reports right up to the instant when the red area was approached. From each of the three came a vague description of the peculiarity of the ground ahead of them: it seems to glitter with a queer metallic sheen. Then, from each of the three, as they passed over the boundary—nothing! All radio communication ceased as abruptly as though they'd been stricken dead."

He stared at Brand. "That's all I can tell you, little enough, God knows. Something ominous and strange is contained in that red spot; but what its nature may be, we cannot even guess. I want you to go there and find out."

Brand's determined jaw jutted out, and his lips thinned to a purposeful line. He stood to attention.

"I'll be leaving to-night, sir. Or sooner if you like. I could go this afternoon; in an hour—"

"To-night is soon enough," said Stone with a smile. "Now, who do you want to accompany you?"

Brand thought a moment. On so long a journey as a trip to Jupiter there was only room in a space ship—what with supplies and all—for one other man. It behooved him to pick his companion carefully.

"I'd like Dex Harlow," he said at last. "He's been to Jupiter before, working with me in plotting the northern hemisphere. He's a good man."

"He is," agreed Stone, nodding approval of Brand's choice. "I'll have him report to you at once."

He rose and held out his hand. "I'm relying on you, Captain Bowen," he said. "I won't give any direct orders; use your own discretion. But I would advise you not to try to land in the red area. Simply fly low over it, and see what you can discern from the air. Good-by, and good luck."

Brand saluted, and went out, to go his own quarters and make the few preparations necessary for his sudden emergency flight.

THE work of exploring the planets that swung with Earth around the sun was still a new branch of the service. Less than ten years ago, it had been, when Ansen devised his first crude atomic motor.

At once, with the introduction of this tremendous new motive power, men had begun to build space ships and explore the sky. And, as so often happens with a new invention, the thing had grown rather beyond itself.

Everywhere amateur space flyers launched forth into the heavens to try their new celestial wings. Everywhere young and old enthusiasts set Ansen motors into clumsily insulated shells and started for Mars or the moon or Venus.

The resultant loss of life, as might have been foreseen, was appalling. Eager but inexperienced explorers edged over onto the wrong side of Mercury and were burned to cinders. They set forth in ships

that were badly insulated, and froze in the absolute zero of space. They learned the atomic motor controls too hastily, ran out of supplies or lost their courses, and wandered far out into space—stiff corpses in coffins that were to be buried only in time's infinity.

To stop the foolish waste of life, the Earth Government stepped in. It was decreed that no space ship might be owned or built privately. It was further decreed that those who felt an urge to explore must join the regular service and do so under efficient supervision. And there was created the Government bureau designated as the Planetary Exploration Control Board, which was headed by Commander Stone.

UNDER this Board the exploration of the planets was undertaken methodically and efficiently, with a minimum of lives sacrificed.

Mercury was charted, tested for essential minerals, and found to be a valueless rock heap too near the sun to support life.

Venus was visited and explored segment by segment; and friendly relations were established with the rather stupid but peaceable people found there.

Mars was mapped. Here the explorers had lingered a long time: and all over this planet's surface were found remnants of a vast and intricate civilization—from the canals that laced its surface, to great cities with mighty buildings still standing. But of life there was none. The atmosphere was too rare to support it; and the theory was that it had constantly thinned through thousands of years till the last Martian had gasped and died in air too attenuated to support life even in creatures that must have grown greater and greater chested in eons of adaptation.

Then Jupiter had been reached; and here the methodical, planet by planet work promised to be checked for a long time to come. Jupiter, with its mighty surface area, was going to take some exploring! It would be years before it could be plotted even superficially.

BRAND had been to Jupiter on four different trips; and, as he walked toward his quarters from Stone's office, he reviewed what he had learned on those trips.

Jupiter, as he knew it, was a vast globe of vague horror and sharp contrasts.

Distant from the sun as it was, it received little solar heat. But, with so great a mass, it had cooled off much more slowly than any of the other planets known, and had immense internal heat. This meant that the air—which closely approximated Earth's air in density—was cool a few hundred yards up from the surface of the planet, and dankly hot close to the ground. The result, as the cold air constantly sank into the warm, was a thick steamy blanket of fog that covered everything perpetually.

Because of the recent cooling, life was not far advanced on Jupiter. Too short a time ago the sphere had been but a blazing mass. Tropical marshes prevailed, crisscrossed by mighty rivers at warmer than blood heat. Giant, hideous fernlike growths crowded one another in an everlasting jungle. And among the distorted trees, from the blanket of soft white fog that hid all from sight, could be heard constantly an ear-splitting chorus of screams and bellows and whistling snarls. It made the blood run cold just to listen—and to speculate on what gigantic but tiny-brained monsters made them.

Now and then, when Brand had been flying dangerously low over the surface, a wind had risen strong enough to dispel the fog banks for an instant; and he had caught a

flash of Jovian life. Just a flash, for example, of a monstrous lizard-like thing too great to support its own bulk; or a creature all neck and tail, with ridges of scale on its armored hide and a small serpentine head weaving back and forth among the jungle growths.

OCCASIONALLY he had landed—always staying close to the space ship, for Jupiter's gravity made movement a slow and laborious process, and he didn't want to be caught too far from security. At such times he might hear a crashing and splashing and see a reptilian head loom gigantically at him through the fog. Then he would discharge the deadly explosive gun which was Earth's latest weapon, and the creature would crash to the ground. The chorus of hissings and bellowings would increase as he hastened slowly and laboriously back to the ship, indicating that other unseen monsters of the steamy jungle had flocked to tear the dead giant to pieces and bolt it down.

Oh, Jupiter was a nice planet! mused Brand. A sweet place—if one happened to be a two-hundred-foot snake or something!

He had always thought the entire globe was in that new, raw, marshy state. But he had worked only in one comparatively small area of the northern hemisphere; had never been within thirty thousand miles of the red spot. What might lie in that ominous crimson patch, he could not even guess. However, he reflected, he was soon to find out, though he might never live to tell about it.

Shrugging his shoulders, he turned into the fifty story building in which was his modest apartment. There he found, written by the automatic stylus on his radio pad, the message: "Be with you at seven o'clock. Best regards, and I hope you strangle. Dex Harlow."

DEX HARLOW was a six-foot Senior Lieutenant who had been on many an out-of-the-way exploratory trip. Like Brand he was just under thirty and perpetually thirsting for the bizarre in life. He was a walking document of planetary activity. He was still baked a brick red from a trip to Mercury a year before; he had a scar on his forehead, the result of jumping forty feet one day on the moon when he'd meant to jump only twenty; he was minus a finger which had been irreparably frost-bitten on Mars; and he had a crumpled nose that was the outcome of a brush with a ten-foot bandit on Venus who'd tried to kill him for his explosive gun and supply of glass, dyite-containing cartridges.

He clutched Brand's fingers in a bone-mangling grip, and threw his hat into a far corner.

"You're a fine friend!" he growled cheerfully. "Here I'm having a first rate time for myself, swimming and planing along the Riviera, with two more weeks leave ahead of me—and I get a call from the Old Man to report to you. What excuse have you for your crime?"

"A junket to Jupiter," said Brand. "Would you call that a good excuse?"

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Dex. "Wouldn't you know it? Of course you'd have to pick a spot four hundred million miles away from all that grand swimming I was having!"

"Would you like to go back on leave, and have me choose someone else?" inquired Brand solemnly.

"Well, no," said Dex hastily. "Now that I'm here, I suppose I might as well go through with it."

Brand laughed. "Try and get you out of it! I know your attitude toward a real jaunt. And it's a real jaunt we've got ahead of us, too,

old boy. We're going to the red spot. Immediately."

DEX'S sandy eyebrows shot up. "The red spot! That's where Coblenz and Heiroy were lost!"

"And Journeyman," added Brand. "He's the latest victim of whatever's in the hell-hole."

Dex whistled. "Journeyman too! Well, all I've got to say is that whatever's there must be strong medicine. Journeyman was a damn fine man, and as brave as they come. Have you any idea what it's all about?"

"Not an idea. Nobody has. We're to go and find out—if we can. Are you all ready?"

"All ready," said Dex.

"So am I. We'll start at eleven o'clock in one of the Old Man's best cruisers. Meanwhile, we might as well go and hunt up a dinner somewhere, to fortify us against the synthetic pork chops and bread we'll be swallowing for the next fortnight."

They went out; and at ten minutes of eleven reported at the great space ship hangars north of New York, with their luggage, a conspicuous item of which was a chess board to help while away the long, long days of spacial travel. Brand then paused a little while for a final check-up on directions.

They clambered into the tiny control room and shut the hermetically sealed trap-door. Brand threw the control switch and precisely at eleven o'clock the conical shell of metal shot heavenward, gathering such speed that it was soon invisible to human eyes. He set their course toward the blazing speck that was Jupiter, four hundred million miles away; and then reported their start by radio to Commander Stone's night operator.

The investigatory expedition to the ominous red spot of the giant of the solar system was on.

CHAPTER II

The Pipe-like Men

BRAND began to slacken speed on the morning of the thirteenth day (morning, of course, being a technical term: there are no horizons in space for the sun to rise over). Jupiter was still an immense distance off; but it took a great while to slow the momentum of the space ship, which, in the frictionless emptiness of space, had been traveling faster and faster for nearly three hundred hours.

Behind them was the distant ball of sun, so far off that it looked no larger than a red-hot penny. Before them was the gigantic disk of Jupiter, given a white tinge by the perpetual fog blankets, its outlines softened by its thick layer of atmosphere and cloud banks. Two of its nine satellites were in sight at the moment, with a third edging over the western rim.

"Makes you think you're drunk and seeing triple, doesn't it?" commented Dex, who was staring out the thick glass panel beside Brand. "Nine moons! Almost enough for one planet!"

Brand nodded abstractly, and concentrated on the control board. Rapidly the ship rocketed down toward the surface. The disk became a whirling, gigantic plate; and then an endless plain, with cloud formations beginning to take on definite outline.

"About to enter Jupiter's atmosphere," Brand spoke into the radio transmitter. Over the invisible thread of radio connection between the space ship and Earth, four hundred million miles behind, flashed the message.

"All right. For God's sake, be careful," came the answer, minutes later. "Say something at least every half hour, to let us know communication is unbroken. We will sound at ten second intervals."

The sounding began: *peep*, a shrill little piping noise like the fiddle of a cricket. Ten seconds later it came again: *peep*. Thereafter, intermittently, it keened through the control room—a homely, comforting sound to let them know that there was a distant thread between them and Earth.

LOWER the shell rocketed. The endless plain slowly ceased its rushing underneath them as they entered the planet's atmosphere and began to be pulled around with it in its revolution. Far to the west a faint red glow illumined the sky.

The two men looked at each other, grimly, soberly.

"We're here," said Dex, flexing the muscles of his powerful arms.

"We are," said Brand, patting the gun in his holster.

The rapid dusk of the giant planet began to close in on them. The thin sunlight darkened; and with its lowering, the red spot of Jupiter glared more luridly ahead of them. Silently the two men gazed at it, and wondered what it held.

They shot the space ship toward it, and halted a few hundred miles away. Watery white light from the satellites, "that jitter around in the sky like a bunch of damned waterbugs," as Dex put it, was now the sole illumination.

They hung motionless in their space shell, to wait through the five-hour Jovian night for the succeeding five hours of daylight to illumine a slow cruise over the red area that, in less than a year, had swallowed up three of Earth's space ships. And ever as they waited, dozing a little, speculating as to the nature of the danger they faced, the peep, peep of the radio shrilled in their ears to tell them that there was still a connection—though a very tenuous one—with their mother planet.

"RED spot ten miles away," said Brand in the transmitter. "We're approaching it slowly."

The tiny sun had leaped up over Jupiter's horizon; and with its appearance they had sent the ship planing toward their mysterious destination. Beneath them the fog banks were thinning, and ahead of them were no clouds. For some reason there was a clarity unusual to Jupiter's atmosphere in the air above the red section.

"Red spot one mile ahead, altitude forty thousand feet," reported Brand.

He and Dex peered intently through the port glass panel. Ahead and far below, their eyes caught an odd metallic sheen. It was as though the ground there were carpeted with polished steel that reflected red firelight.

Tense, filled with an excitement that set their pulses pounding wildly, they angled slowly down, nearer to the edge of the vast crimson area, closer to the ground. The radio keened its monotonous signal.

Brand crawled to the transmitter, laboriously, for his body tipped the scales here at nearly four hundred pounds.

"We can see the metallic glitter that Journeyman spoke of," he said. "No sign of life of any kind, though. The red glow seems to flicker a little."

Closer the ship floated. Closer. To right and left of them for vast distances stretched the red area. Ahead of them for hundreds of miles they knew it extended.

"We're right on it now," called Brand. "Right on it—we're going over the edge—we're—"

Next instant he was sprawling on the floor, with Dex rolling helplessly on top of him, while the space ship bounced up twenty thousand feet as though propelled by a giant sling.

THE peep, peep of the radio signalling stopped. The space ship rolled helplessly for a moment, then resumed an even keel. Brand and Dex gazed at each other.

"What the hell?" said Dex.

He started to get to his feet, put all his strength into the task of moving his Jupiter-weighted body, and crashed against the top of the control room.

"Say!" he sputtered, rubbing his head. "Say, what *is* this?"

Brand, profiting by his mistake, rose more cautiously, shut off the atomic motor, and approached a glass panel again. "God knows what it is," he said with a shrug. "Somehow, with our passing into the red area, the pull of gravity has been reduced by about ten, that's all."

"Oh, so that's all, is it? Well, what's happened to old Jupe's gravity?"

Again Brand shrugged. "I haven't any idea. Your guess is as good as mine."

He peered down through the panel, and stiffened in surprise.

"Dex!" he cried. "We're moving! And the motor is shut off!"

"We're drawing down closer to the ground, too," announced Dex, pointing to their altimeter. "Our altitude has been reduced five thousand feet in the last two minutes."

Quickly Brand turned on the motor in reverse. The space ship, as the rushing, reddish ground beneath indicated, continued to glide forward as though pulled by an invisible rope. He turned on full power The ship's progress was checked a little. A very little! And the metallic red surface under them grew nearer as they steadily lost altitude.

"Something seems to have got us by the nose," said Dex. "We're on our way to the center of the red spot, I guess—to find whatever it was that Journeyman found. And the radio communication has been broken somehow. . . ."

Wordlessly, they stared out the panel, while the shell, quivering with the strain of the atomic motor's fight against whatever unseen force it was that relentlessly drew them forward, bore them swiftly toward the heart of the vast crimson area.

"LOOK!" cried Brand.

For over an hour the ship had been propelled swiftly, irresistibly toward the center of the red spot. It had been up about forty thousand feet. Now, with a jerk that sent both men reeling, it had been drawn down to within fifteen thousand feet of the surface; and the sight that was now becoming more and more visible was ineredible.

Beneath was a vast, orderly checkerboard. Every alternate square was covered by what seemed a jointless metal plate. The open squares, plainly land under cultivation, were surrounded by gleaming fences that hooked each metal square with every other one of its kind as batteries are wired in series. Over these open squares progressed tiny, two-legged figures, for the most part following gigantic shapeless animals like figures out of a dream. Ahead suddenly appeared the spires and towers of an enormous city!

Metropolis and cultivated land! It was as unbelievable, on that raw new planet, as such a sight would have been could a traveler in time have observed it in the midst of a dim Pleistocene panorama of young Earth.

It was instantly apparent that the city was their destination. Rapidly the little ship was rushed toward it; and, realizing at last the futility of its laboring, Brand cut off the atomic motor and let the shell drift.

Over a group of squat square

buildings their ship passed, decreasing speed and drifting lower with every moment. The lofty structures that were the nucleus of the strange city loomed closer. Now they were soaring slowly down a wide thoroughfare; and now, at last, they hovered above a great open square that was thronged with figures.

Lower they dropped. Lower. And then they settled with a slight jar on a surface made of reddish metal; and the figures rushed to surround them.

LOOKING out the glass panel at these figures, both Brand and Dex exclaimed aloud and covered their eyes for a moment to shut out the hideous sight of them. Now they examined them closely.

Manlike they were; and yet like no human being conceivable to an Earth mind. They were tremendously tall—twelve feet at least—but as thin as so many animated poles. Their two legs were scarce four inches through, taperless, boneless, like lengths of pipe; and like two flexible pipes they were joined to a slightly larger pipe of a torso that could not have been more than a foot in diameter. There were four arms, a pair on each side of the cylindrical body, that weaved feebly about like lengths of rubber hose.

Set directly on the pipe-like body, as a pumpkin might be balanced on a pole was a perfectly round cranium in which were glassy, staring eyes, with dull pupils like those of a sick dog. The nose was but a tab of flesh. The mouth was a minute, circular thing, soft and flabby looking, which opened and shut regularly with the creature's breathing. It resembled the snout-like mouth of a fish, of the sucker variety; and fish-like, too, was the smooth and slimy skin that covered the beanpole body.

HUNDREDS of the repulsive things, there were. And all of them shoved and crowded, as a disorderly mob on Earth might do, to get close to the Earthmen's ship. Their big dull eyes peered in through the glass panels, and their hands—mere round blobs of gristle in the palms of which were set single sucker disks—pattered against the metal hull of the shell.

"God!" said Brand with a shudder. "Fancy those things feeling over your body. . . ."

"They're hostile, whatever they are," said Dex. "Look out: that one's pointing something at you!"

One of the slender, tottering creatures had raised an arm and leveled at Brand something that looked rather like an elongated, old-fashioned flashlight. Brand involuntarily ducked. The clear glass panel between them and the mob outside gave him a queasy feeling of being exposed to whatever missile might lurk in the thing's tube.

"What do we do now?" demanded Dex with a shaky laugh. "You're chief of this expedition. I'm waiting for orders."

"We wait right here," replied Brand. "We're safe in the shell till we're starved out. At least they can't get in to attack us."

But it developed that, while the slimy looking things might not be able to get in, they had ways of reaching the Earthmen just the same!

THE creature with the gun-like tube, extended it somewhat further toward Brand.

Brand felt a sharp, unpleasant tingle shoot through his body, as though he had received an electric shock. He winced, and cried out at the sudden pain of it.

"What's the matter—" Dex began. But hardly had the words left his mouth when he, too, felt the shock. A couple of good, hearty

Earth oaths exploded from his lips.

The repulsive creature outside made an authoritative gesture. He seemed to be beckoning to them, his huge dull eyes glaring threateningly at the same moment.

"Our beanpole friend is suggesting that we get out of the shell and stay awhile," said Dex with grim humor. "They seem anxious to entertain us—*ouch!*"

As the two men made no move to obey the beckoning gesture, the creature had raised the tube again; and again the sharp, unpleasant shock shot through them.

"What the devil are we going to do?" exclaimed Brand. "If we go out in that mob of nightmare things—it's going to be messy. As long as we stay in the shell we have some measure of protection."

"Not much protection when they can sting us through metal and glass at will," growled Dex. "Do you suppose they can turn the juice on harder? Or is that bee-sting their best effort?"

As though in direct answer to his words, the blob-like face of the being who seemed in authority convulsed with anger and he raised the tube again. This time the shock that came from it was sufficient to throw the two men to the floor.

"Well, we can't stay in the ship, that's certain," said Brand. "I guess there's only one thing to do."

Dex nodded. "Climb out of here and take as many of these skinny horrors with us into hell as we can," he agreed.

Once more the shock stung them, as a reminder not to keep their captors waiting. With their shoulders bunched for abrupt action, and their guns in hand, the two men walked to the trap-door of the ship. They threw the heavy bolts, drew a deep breath—and flung open the door to charge unexpectedly toward the thickest mass of creatures that surrounded the ship!

IN a measure their charge was successful. Its very suddenness caught some of the tall monstrosities off guard. Half a dozen of them stopped the fragile glass bullets to writhe in horrible death on the red metal paving of the square. But that didn't last long.

In less than a minute, thin, clammy arms were winding around the Earthmen's wrists, and their guns were wrenched from them. And then started a hand-to-hand encounter that was all the more hideous for being so unlike any fighting that might have occurred on Earth.

With a furious growl Dex charged the nearest creature, whose huge round head swayed on its stalk of a body fully six feet above his own head. He gathered the long thin legs in a football grip, and sent the thing crashing full length on its back. The great head thumped resoundingly against the metal paving, and the creature lay motionless.

For an instant Dex could only stare at the thing. It had been so easy, like overcoming a child. But even as that thought crossed his mind, two of the tall thin figures closed in behind him. Four pairs of arms wound around him, feebly but tenaciously, like wet seaweed.

They began to constrict and wind tighter around him. He tore at them, dislodged all but two. His sturdy Earth leg went back to sweep the stalk-like legs of his attackers from under them. One of the things went down, to twist weakly in a laborious attempt to rise again. But the other, by sheer force of height and reach, began to bear Dex down.

Savagely he laced out with his fists, battering the pulpy face that was pressing down close to his. The big eyes blinked shut, but the four hose-like arms did not relax their clasp. Dex's hands sought fiercely for the thing's throat. But

it had no throat: the head, set directly on the thin shoulders, defied all throttling attempts.

THEN, just as Dex was feeling that the end had come, he felt the creature wrench from him, and saw it slide in a tangle of arms and legs over the smooth metal pavement. He got shakily to his feet, to see Brand standing over him and flailing out with his fists at an ever tightening circle of towering figures.

"Thanks," panted Dex. And he began again, tripping the twelve-foot things in order to get them down within reach, battering at the great pulpy heads, fighting blindly in that expressed craving to take as many of the creatures into hell with him as he could manage. Beside him fought Brand, steadily, coolly, grim of jaw and unblinking of eye.

Already the struggle had gone on far longer than they had dreamed it might. For some reason the grotesque creatures delayed killing them. That they could do so any time they pleased, was certain: if the monsters could reach them with their shock-tubes through the double insulated hull of the space ship, they could certainly kill them out in the open.

Yet they made no move to do so. The deadly tubes were not used. The screeching gargoyles, instead, devoted all their efforts to merely hurling their attenuated bodies on the two men as though they wished to capture them alive.

Finally, however, the nature of the battle changed. The tallest of the attackers opened his tiny mouth and piped a signal. The ring of weaving tall bodies surrounding the two opened and became a U. The creatures in the curve of the U raised their shock-tubes and, with none of their own kind behind the victims to share in its discharge, released whatever power it was that lurked in them.

The shock was terrific. Without the glass and metal of the ship to protect them, out in the open and defenceless, Brand and Dex got some indication of its real power.

Writhing and twitching, feeling as though pierced by millions of red hot needles, they went down. A swarm of pipe-like bodies smothered them, and the fight was over.

CHAPTER III

The Coming of Greca

THE numbing shock from the tubes left the Earthmen's bodies almost paralyzed for a time; but their brains were unfogged enough for them to observe only too clearly all that went on from the point of their capture.

They were bound hand and foot. At a piping cry from the leader, several of the gangling figures picked them up in reedy arms and began to walk across the square, away from the ship. Brand noticed that his bearers' arms trembled with his weight; and sensed the flabbiness of the substance that took the place in them of good solid muscle. Physically these things were soft and ineffectual indeed. They had only the ominous tubes with which to fight.

The eery procession, with the bound Earthmen carried in the lead, wound toward a great building fringing the square. In through the high arched entrance of this building they went, and up a sloping incline to its tower-top. Here, in a huge bare room, the two were unceremoniously dumped to the floor.

While three of the things stood guard with the mysterious tubes, another unbound them. A whole shower of high pitched, piping syllables was hurled at them, speech which sounded threatening and con-

temptuous but was otherwise, of course, entirely unintelligible, and then the creatures withdrew. The heavy metal door was slammed shut, and they were alone.

Brand drew a long breath, and began to feel himself all over for broken bones. He found none; he was still nerve-wracked from that last terrific shock, but otherwise whole and well.

"Are you hurt, Dex?" he asked solicitously.

"I guess not," replied Dex, getting uncertainly to his feet. "And I'm wondering why. It seems to me the brutes were uncommonly considerate of us—and I'm betting the reason is one we won't like!"

Brand shrugged. "I guess we'll find out their intentions soon enough. Let's see what our surroundings look like."

They walked to the nearest window-aperture, and gazed out on a startling and marvelous scene.

BENEATH their high tower window, extending as far as the eye could reach, lay the city, lit by the reddish glare of the peculiar metal with which its streets were paved. For the most part the metropolis consisted of perfectly square buildings pierced by many windows to indicate that each housed a large number of inmates. But here and there grotesque turrets lanced the sky, and symbolic domes arched above the surrounding flat metal roofs.

One building in particular they noticed. This was an enormous structure in the shape of a half-globe that reared its spherical height less than an eighth of a mile from the building they were in. It was situated off to their right at the foot of a vast, high-walled enclosure whose near end seemed to be formed by the right wall of their prison. They could only see it by leaning far out of the window; and it would not have come to their attention at all had they not heard it first—or, rather, heard the sound of something within it: for from it came a curious whining hum that never varied in intensity, something like the hum of a gigantic dynamo, only greater and of a more penetrating pitch.

"Sounds as though it might be some sort of central power station," said Brand. "But what could it supply power for?"

"Give it up," said Dex. "For their damned shock-tubes, perhaps, among other things—"

He broke off abruptly as a sound of sliding bolts came from the doorway. The two men whirled around to face the door, their fists doubling instinctively against whatever new danger might threaten them.

THE door was opened and two of their ugly, towering enemies came in, their tubes held conspicuously before them. Behind came another figure; and at sight of this one, so plainly not of the race of Jupiter, the Earthmen gasped with wonder.

They saw a girl who might have come from Earth, save that she was taller than most Earth women —of a regal height that reached only an inch or two below Brand's own six foot one. She was beautifully formed, and had wavy dark hair and clear light blue eyes. A sort of sandal covered each small bare foot; and a gauzy tunic, reaching from above the knee to the shoulder, only half shielded her lovely figure.

She was bearing a metal container in which was a mess of stuff evidently intended as food. The guards halted and stepped aside to let her pass into the room. Then they backed out, constantly keeping Dex and Brand covered with the tubes, and closed and barred the door.

The girl smiled graciously at the

admiration in the eyes of both the men—a message needing no interplanetary interpretation. She advanced, and held the metal container toward them.

"Eat," she said softly. "It is good food, and life giving."

FOR an instant Brand was dumbfounded. For here was language he could understand—which was incredible on this far-flung globe. Then he suddenly comprehended why her sentences were so intelligible.

She was versed in mental telepathy. And versed to a high degree! He'd had some experience with telepathy on Venus; but theirs was a crude thought-speech compared to the fluency possessed by the beautiful girl before him.

"Who are you?" he asked wonderingly.

"I am Greca"—it was very hard to grasp names or abstract terms—"of the fourth satellite."

"Then you are not of these monsters of Jupiter?"

"Oh, no! I am their captive, as are all my people. We are but slaves of the tall ones."

Brand glanced at Dex. "Here's a chance to get some information, perhaps," he murmured.

Dex nodded; but meanwhile the girl had caught his thought. She smiled—a tragic, wistful smile.

"I shall be happy to tell you anything in my power to tell," she informed him. "But you must be quick. I can only remain with you a little while."

She sat down on the floor with them—the few bench-like things obviously used by the tall creatures as chairs were too high for them—and with the informality of adversity the three captives began to talk. Swiftly Brand got a little knowledge of Greca's position on Jupiter, and of the racial history that led up to it.

FOUR of the nine satellites of Jupiter were now the home of living beings. But two only, at the dawn of history as Greca knew it, had been originally inhabited. These were the fourth and the second.

On the fourth there dwelt a race, "like me," as Greca put it—a kindly, gentle people content to live and let live.

On the second had been a race of immensely tall, but attenuated and physically feeble things with great heads and huge dull eyes and characters distinguished mainly for cold-blooded savagery.

The inhabitants of the fourth satellite had remained in ignorance of the monsters on the second till one day "many, many ages ago," a fleet of clumsy ships appeared on the fourth satellite. From the ships had poured thousands of pipe-like creatures, armed with horrible rods of metal that killed instantly and without a sound. The things, it seemed, had crowded over the limits of their own globe, and had been forced to find more territory.

They had made captive the entire population of the satellite. Then—for like all dangerous vermin they multiplied rapidly—they had overflowed to the first and fifth satellites—the others were uninhabitable—and finally to the dangerous surface of Jupiter itself. Everywhere they had gone, they had taken droves of Greca's people to be their slaves, "and the source of their food," added Greca, with a shudder; a statement that was at the moment unintelligible to the two men.

BRAND stared sympathetically at her. "They treat them very badly?" he asked gently.

"Terribly! Terribly!" said Greca, shuddering again.

"But *you* seem quite privileged," he could not help saying.

She shook her dainty head pathetically. "I am of high rank among

my people. I am a priestess of our religion, which is the religion of The Great White One who rules all the sky everywhere. The Rogans" (it was the best translation Brand could make of her mental term for the slimy tall things that held them captive) "—the Rogans hold my fate over the heads of my race. Should they rebel, I would be thrown to the monster in the pen. Of course the Rogans could crush any revolt with their terrible tubes, but they do not want to kill their slaves if they can help it. They find it more effective to hold their priestesses in hostage."

Brand turned from personal history to more vital subjects.

"Why," he asked Greca, "are the shining red squares of metal laid everywhere over this empire of the Rogans?"

"To make things light," was the reply. "When the Rogans first came to this mighty sphere, they could hardly move. Things are so heavy here, somehow. So their first thought was to drive my enslaved people to the casting and laying of the metal squares and the metal beams that connect them, in order to make things weigh less."

"But how do the plates function?"

GRECA did not know this, save vaguely. She tried to express her little knowledge of the scientific achievements of the savage Rogans. After some moments Brand turned to Dex and said:

"As near as I can get it, the Rogans, by this peculiar red metal alloy, manage to trap and divert the permanent lines of force, the magnetic field, of Jupiter itself. So the whole red spot is highly magnetized, which somehow upsets natural gravitational attraction. I suppose it is responsible for the discoloration of the ground, too."

He turned to question the girl further about this, but she had got nervously to her feet already.

"I'll be taken away soon," she said. "I was brought in here only to urge you to eat the food. I must be interpreter, since the Rogans speak not with the mind, and I know their hateful tongue."

"Why are they so anxious for us to eat?" demanded Dex with an uneasy frown.

"So you will be strong, and endure for a long time the—the ordeal they have in store for you," faltered the girl at last. "They intend to force from you the secret of the power that drove your ship here, so they too may have command of space."

"But I don't understand," frowned Brand. "They must already have a means of space navigation. They came here to Jupiter from the satellites."

"Their vessels are crude, clumsy things. The journey from the nearest satellite is the limit of their flying range. They have nothing like your wonderful little ships, and they want to know how to build and power them."

SHE gazed sorrowfully at them and went on: "You see, yours is the fourth space ship to visit their kingdom; and that makes them fearful because it shows they are vulnerable to invasion. They want to stop that by invading your planet first. Besides their fear, there is their greed. Their looking-tubes reveal that yours is a fruitful and lovely sphere, and they are insatiable in their lust for new territories. Thus they plan to go to your planet as soon as they are able, and kill or enslave all the people there as they have killed and enslaved my race."

"They'll have a job on their hands trying to do that!" declared Dex stoutly.

But Brand paled. "They can do it!" he snapped. "Look at those

death-tubes of theirs. We have no arms to compete with that." He turned to Greca. "So the Rogans plan to force the secret of our motors from us by torture?"

She nodded, and caught his hand in hers.

"Yes. They will do with you as they did with the six who came before you—and who died before surrendering the secret."

"So! We know now what happened to Journeyman and the others!" burst out Dex. "I'll see 'em in hell before I'll talk!"

"And me," nodded Brand. "But that doesn't cure the situation. As long as ships disappear in this red inferno, so long will the Old Man keep sending others to find out what's wrong. The Rogans will capture them as easily as they captured us. And eventually someone will happen along who'll weaken under torture. Then—"

HE stopped. A dread vision filled his mind of Earth depopulated by the feebly ferocious Rogans, of rank on rank of Earth's vast armies falling in stricken rows at the shock of the Rogans' tubes.

Greca caught the vision. She nodded. "Yes, that is what would happen if they found ways of reaching your globe."

"But, God, Brand, we can't allow that!" cried Dex. "We've got to find a way to spike the guns of these walking gas-pipes, somehow!"

Brand sighed heavily. "We are two against hundreds of thousands. We are bare-handed, and the Rogans have those damned tubes. Anyway, we are on the verge of death at this very moment. What under heaven can we do to spike their guns?"

He was silent a moment; and in the silence the steady hum from the domed building outside came to his ears.

"What's in that big, round topped building, Greca?" he asked quietly.

"I do not know, exactly," replied the girl. "There is some sort of machinery in it, and to it go connecting beams from all the square metal plates everywhere. That is all I know."

Brand started to question her further, but her time was up. The two guards poked their loathsome pumpkin heads in the doorway and contemptuously beckoned her out. She answered resignedly, in the piping Rogan tongue, and went with them. But she turned to wave shyly, commiseratingly at the two men; and the expression in her clear blue eyes as they rested on Brand made his heart contract and then leap on with a mighty bound.

"We have an ally in her," murmured Brand. "Though God only knows if that will mean anything to us. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

In the Tower

"WHAT I can't figure out," said Dex, striding up and down the big bare room, "is why we're needed to tell them about the atomic motor. They've got our ship, and three others besides. I should think they could learn about the motor just by taking it apart and studying it."

Brand grinned mirthlessly, recalling the three years of intensive study it had taken him to learn the refinements of atomic motive power. "If you'd ever qualified as a space navigator, Dex, you'd know better. The Rogans are an advanced race; their control of polar magnetism and the marvelously high-powered telescopes Greca mentions prove that; but I doubt if they could ever analyze that atomic motor with no hint as to how it works."

Silence descended on them again, in which each was lost in his own thoughts.

How many hours had passed, the Earthmen did not know. They had spent the time in fruitless planning to escape from their tower room and go back to the ship again. Though how they could get away in the ship when the Rogans seemed able to propel it wherever they wished against the utmost power of their motor, they did not attempt to consider.

One of Jupiter's short nights had passed, however—a night weirdly made as light as day by red glares from the plates, which seemed to store up sunlight, among their other functions—and the tiny sun had risen to slant into their window at a sharp angle.

Suddenly they heard the familiar drawing of the great bolts outside their door. It was opened, and a dozen or more of the Rogans came in, with Greca cowering piteously in their midst and attempting to communicate her distress to Brand.

AT the head of the little band of Rogans was one the prisoners had not seen before. He was of great height, fully two feet taller than the others; and he carried himself with an air that proclaimed his importance.

The tall one turned to Greca and addressed a few high-pitched, squeaky words to her. She shook her head; whereupon, at a hissed command, two of the Rogans caught her by the wrists and dragged her forward.

"They have come to question you," Greca lamented to Brand. "And they want to do it through me. But I will not! I will not!"

Brand smiled at her though his lips were pale.

"You are powerless to struggle," he said. "Do as they ask. You cannot help us by refusing, and, in any case, I can promise that they won't learn anything from us."

The tall Rogan teetered up to the prisoners on his gangling legs, and stared icily at them. Crouched beside him, her lovely body all one mute appeal to the Earthmen to forgive her for the part she was forced to play, was Greca.

At length the Rogan leader spoke. He addressed his sibilant words to Greca, though his stony eyes were kept intently on the Earthmen.

"He says," exclaimed Greca telepathically, "to inform you first that he is head of all the Rogan race on this globe, and that all on this globe must do as he commands."

Brand nodded to show he understood the message.

"He says he is going to ask you a few questions, and that you are to answer truthfully if you value your lives:

"First, he wants to know what the people of your world are like. Are they all the same as you?"

DEX started to reply to that; but Brand flung him a warning look. "Tell him we are the least of the Earth people," he answered steadily. "Tell him we are of an inferior race. Most of those on Earth are giants five times as large as we are, and many times more powerful."

Greca relayed the message in the whistling, piping Rogan tongue. The tall one stared, then hissed another sentence to the beautiful interpreter.

"He wants to know," said Greca, "if there are cities on your globe as large and complete as this one."

"There are cities on Earth that make this look like a—a—" Brand cast about for understandable similes— "like a collection of animal burrows."

"He says to describe your planet's war weapons," was the next interpretation. And here Brand let himself go.

With flights of fancy he hadn't

known he was capable of, he described great airships, steered automatically and bristling with guns that discharged explosives powerful enough to kill everything within a range of a thousand miles. He told of billions of thirty-foot giants sheathed in an alloy that would make them invulnerable to any feeble rays the Rogans might have developed. He touched on the certain wholesale death that must overtake any hostile force that tried to invade the planet.

"The Rogan shock-tubes are toys compared with the ray-weapons of Earth," he concluded. "We have arms that can nullify the effects of yours and kill at the same instant. We have—"

But here the Rogan leader turned impatiently away. Greca had been translating sentence by sentence. Now the tall one barked out a few syllables in a squeaky voice.

"He says he knows you are lying," sighed Greca. "For if you on Earth have tubes more effective than theirs why weren't you equipped with them on your expedition here to the red kingdom?"

Brand bit his lips. "Check," he muttered. "The brute has a brain in that ugly head."

THE Rogan leader spoke for a long time then; and at each singsong word, Greca quivered as though lashed by a whip. At length she turned to Brand.

"He has been telling what his hordes can do, answering your boasts with boasts of his own. His words are awful! I won't tell you all he said. I will only say that he is convinced his shock-tubes are superior to any Earth arms, and that he states he will now illustrate their power to you to quell your insolence. I don't know what he means by that. . . ."

But she and the Earthmen were soon to find out.

The Rogan leader stepped to the window and arrogantly beckoned Brand and Dex to join him there. They did; and the leader gazed out and down as though searching for something.

He pointed. The two Earthmen followed his leveled arm with their eyes and saw, a hundred yards or so away, a bent and dreary figure trudging down the metal paving of the street. It was a figure like those to be seen on Earth, which placed it as belonging to Greca's race.

The tall leader drew forth one of the shock-tubes. Seen near at hand, it was observed to be baffingly simple in appearance. It seemed devoid of all mechanism—simply a tube of reddish metal with a sort of handle formed of a coil of heavy wire.

The Rogan pointed the tube at the distant figure.

Greca screamed, and screamed again. Coincident with her cry, as though the sound of it had felled him, the distant slave dropped to the pavement.

THAT was all. The tube had merely been pointed: as far as Brand could see, the Rogan's "hand" had not moved on the barrel of the tube, nor even constricted about the coil of wire that formed its handle. Yet that distant figure had dropped. Furthermore, fumes of greasy black smoke now began to arise from the huddled body; and in less than thirty seconds there was left no trace of it on the gleaming metal pavement.

"So that's what those things are like at full power!" breathed Dex. "My God!"

The Rogan leader spoke a few words. Greca, huddled despairingly on the floor, crushed by this brutal annihilation of one of her countrymen before her very eyes, did not translate. But translation was un-

necessary. The Rogan's icy, triumphant eyes, the very posture of his grotesque body, spoke for him.

"That," he was certainly saying, "is what will happen to any on your helpless planet who dare oppose the Rogan will!"

He whipped out a command to the terror-stricken girl. She rose from her crouching position on the floor; and at length formulated the Rogan's last order:

"You will explain the working of the engine that drove your space ship here."

Dex laughed. It was a short bark of sound, totally devoid of humor, but very full of defiance. Brand thrust his hands into the pockets of his tunic, spread his legs apart, and began to whistle.

A QUIVER that might have been of anger touched the Rogan leader's repulsive little mouth. He glared balefully at the uncowed Earthmen and spoke again, evidently repeating his command. The two turned their backs to him to indicate their refusal to obey.

At that, the tall leader pointed to Dex. In an instant three of the guards had wound their double pairs of arms around his struggling body. Brand sprang to help him, but a touch of the mysterious discharge from the leader's tube sent him writhing to the floor.

"It's no use, Brand," said Dex steadily. He too had stopped struggling, and now stood quietly in the slimy coils of his captors' arms. "I might as well go along with them and get it over with. I probably won't see you again. Good luck!"

He was borne out of the room. The Rogan leader turned to Brand and spoke.

"He says that if your comrade does not tell him what he wants to know, your turn will come next," sobbed Greca. "Oh! Why does not The Great White One strike these monsters to the dust!"

She ran to Brand and pressed her satiny cheek to his. Then she was dragged roughly away.

The great door clanged shut. The heavy outer fastenings clicked into place. Dex had gone to experience whatever it was that Journeyman and the rest had experienced in this red hell. And Brand was left behind to reflect on what dread torments this might comprise; and to pray desperately that no matter what might be done to his shrinking body he would be strong enough to refuse to betray his planet.

CHAPTER V

The Torture Chamber

SWIFTLY Dex was carried down the long ramp to the ground floor, the arms of his captors gripping him with painful tightness. Heading the procession was the immensely tall, gangling Rogan leader, clutching Greca by the wrist and dragging her indifferently along to be his mouthpiece.

They did not stop at the street level; they continued on down another ramp, around a bend, descending an even steeper incline toward the bowels of Jupiter. Their descent ended at last before a huge metal barrier which, at a signal from the leader, drew smoothly up into the ceiling to disclose a gigantic, red-lit chamber underlying the foundations of the building.

In fear and awe, Dex gazed around that huge room.

It resembled in part a nightmare rearrangement of such a laboratory as might be found on Earth; and in part a torture chamber such as the most ferocious of savages might have devised had they been scientifically equipped to add contrivances of supercivilization to the furthering of their primitive lust for cruelty.

There were great benches—head-high to the Earthman—to accommodate the height of the Rogan workmen. There were numberless metal instruments, and glass coils, and enormous retorts; and in one corner an orange colored flame burnt steadily on a naked metal plate, seeming to have no fuel or other source of being.

There was a long rack of cruelly pointed and twisted instruments. Under this was a row of long, delicate pincers, with coils on the handles to indicate that they might be heated to fiendish precision of temperatures. There were gleaming metal racks with calibrated slide-rods and spring dials to denote just what pull was being exerted on whatever unhappy creature might be stretched taut on them. There were tiny cones of metal whose warped, baked appearance testified that they were little portable furnaces that could be placed on any desired portion of the anatomy, to slowly bake the selected disk of flesh beneath them.

DEX shuddered; and a low moan came from Greca, whose clear blue eyes had rested on the contents of this vast room before in her capacity as hostage and interpreter for the inhuman Rogans.

And now another sense of Dex's began to register perception on his brain.

A peculiar odor came to his nostrils. It was a musky, fetid odor, like that to be smelled in an animal cage; but it was sharper, more acrid than anything he had ever smelled on Earth. It smelled—ah, he had it! —*reptilian*. As though somewhere nearby a dozen titantic serpents were coiled ready to spring!

Looking about, Dex saw a six-foot square door of bars in one wall of the laboratory—like the barred entrance to a prison cell. It was from the interstices of this door that the odor seemed to emanate; but he had no chance to make sure, for now the Rogan leader approached him.

"I will first show you," he said, through his mouthpiece, Greca, "what happens to those who oppose our orders. We have a slave who tried to run away into the surrounding jungles three suns ago. . . ."

A man was dragged into the chamber. He was slightly taller and more stockily muscled than an Earthman might be; but otherwise, in facial conformation and general appearance, he might have come here straight from New York City. Dex felt a great pang of sympathy for him. He was so plainly one of humankind, despite the fact that he had been born on a sphere four hundred million miles from Dex's.

The fellow was paralyzed with horror. His eyes, wide and glazed, darted about the torture room like those of a trapped animal. And yet he made no move to break away from the clutch of the two Rogans who held him. He knew he was helpless, that wild-eyed glance told Dex. Knew it so thoroughly that not even his wildest terror could inspire him to try to make a break for freedom, or strike back at the implacable Rogan will.

AT a nod from the leader, the man was stripped to the waist. Here Dex, started in amazement. The man's broad chest was seamed and crisscrossed by literally hundreds of tiny lateral scars, some long healed, and some fresh incisions.

He was dragged to a metal plate set upright in the wall, and secured to it by straps of metal. Evidently the miserable being knew what this portended, for he began to scream —a monotonous, high-pitched shriek that didn't stop till he was out of breath.

The Rogan leader stared at him icily, then depressed a small lever set in the wall beside him. The plate against which the captive was bound began to shine softly with a blue light. The slave twisted in his bonds, screaming again. Rhythmic shudders jerked at his limbs. His lips turned greenish white. The shudders grew more pronounced till it seemed as though he were afflicted with a sort of horrible St. Vitus dance. Then the tall Rogan pulled back the lever. The slave hung away from his supporting shackles, limp and unconscious.

Dex moistened his lips. An electric shock? No, it was something more terrible than that. Some other manifestation of the magnetic power the Rogans had harnessed—a current, perhaps, that depolarized partly the atoms of the body structure? He could only guess. But the convulsed face of the unfortunate victim showed that the torment, whatever it was, was devilish to the last degree!

"That will be the next to the last fate reserved for you," the Rogan informed Dex, through Greca. "Death follows soon after that—but not too soon for you to see and feel what waits for you behind the barred door!" And he nodded toward the cage-entrance affair, from which came the musky, reptilian stench.

"Now that you have seen something of what will happen to you if you refuse to tell us what we want to know, we shall proceed," said the leader.

HE pointed toward one of the gargantuan work benches, and two of the Rogans slid down from it a contrivance that looked familiar to Dex. An instant's scrutiny showed him why it was familiar: it was a partly dismantled atomic motor.

In spite of the ordeal that faced him, Dex felt a thrill of elation as he looked at the motor. In its scattered state, it told a mute story: a story of long and intensive study by the Rogans, which had yielded them no results! Only too obviously, the intricate secret of atomic power had not let itself be solved.

On the heels of the elation that filled his heart, came a sickening realization of his dilemma. He could not have told the Rogans what they wanted to know even if he had wished to! He himself didn't know the principles of the atomic engine. As Brand had remarked, he was no space navigator; he was simply a prosaic lieutenant, competent only at fighting, not at all versed in science.

He knew, though, that it would do no good to assert his ignorance to the Rogans. They simply wouldn't believe him.

"You will rebuild this engine for us," ordered the tall leader, "showing us the purpose of each part, and how the power is extracted from the fuel. After that you will set it running for us, and instruct us in its control."

Dex braced himself. His final moment had come.

By way of indicating his refusal he looked away from the dismantled motor and said nothing. The Rogan repeated his command. Dex made no move. Then the leader acted.

He said something to the Rogan guards who had been standing by all this while, alert against an outbreak from their prisoner. Dex was caught up, carried to one of the metal racks, and thrown down on its calibrated bed. Loops of metal, like handcuffs, were snapped around his wrists and ankles; and a metal hoop was clamped over his throat, pinning him to the torture rack. Resistance would have been useless, and Dex submitted quietly.

THE contrivance, with him on it, was wheeled toward the barred door. It was halted at a spot marked on the floor, about thirty feet from the bars. The Rogan leader stepped alongside the rack, with Greca trembling beside him.

Dex closed his eyes for a moment, grimly marshaling strength of will to go through the trial that was just beginning.

The Rogan leader depressed another lever in the rock wall. The barred door slid slowly up, to reveal the receding darknesses of some great cave, or room, that adjoined the laboratory. Dex rolled his eyes so that he could watch the doorway; and, in a cold perspiration, waited for whatever might appear.

It was not long in coming!

The reptilian smell suddenly grew stronger. There was a booming hiss, a savage bellowing. A clattering of vast scales rattled out as some body weighing many tons was dragged over rock flooring. Then, before Dex's staring eyes appeared a huge, wedge-shaped head, at sight of which he bit his lips to keep from crying aloud.

Often enough he had seen one of those terrific heads looming in the fog of the northern hemisphere of Jupiter. He did not know the genus of the vast monster that bore it, but he did know it for the fiercest of the lizard giants that roamed the Jovian jungles. A creature larger than a terrestrial whale, with great long neck and heavy long tail dragging yards behind it, it would find the puny bulk of a man nothing but a morsel in its jaws!

Again the gigantic thing hissed and bellowed. And then its huge head came through the six-foot door and its neck uncoiled to send the gaping jaws within a foot of Dex. There it struggled to reach him, prevented by the small doorway that restrained the bulk of its enormous body, its head only inches away from the cleverly measured spot to which the metal rack had been wheeled.

DEX stared, hypotized, into the dull, stony eyes of the beast, gasping for breath in the stench of its exhalations. The jaws snapped shut, fanning his cheek. He fought for self-control. Steady! Steady! The slimy Rogans had no intention of feeding him to the thing yet. Not till they had made more determined efforts to wring from him the secret of the motor. They were just prefacing actual physical torture with hellish mental torture, that was all.

That he was right in his guess was proved in a few moments. He heard a louder hiss from the great lizard so near him. Opening his eyes, he saw the Rogan leader in the process of forcing the serpentine neck to withdraw foot by foot back into the doorway, using his shock-tube as a sort of distant prod.

The monster swayed its ugly flat head back and forth, hissing deafeningly at the sting of the tube, now and again lunging with its vast unseen body at the too narrow entrance that kept it from entering the laboratory. Dex could hear the foundation walls of the building creak at the onslaught of that tremendous weight.

If it would only break through! he thought savagely. But it wasn't going to. In a short while it was cowed by the deadly tube, and withdrew its head awkwardly from the chamber. The barred door slid down into place; and the Rogan leader once more turned his attention to his prisoner.

"You will be wheeled within reach of the creature as the last step of your fate," Dex was informed. "Meanwhile, we shall start with something less deadly. . ."

A cogged wheel beside him was turning a notch. Dex felt the sliding bed of the rack crawl slightly under him. Intolerable tension was suddenly placed on his arms and legs. The leader stared at a spring dial; and moved the wheel another notch. The rack expanded again, stretching Dex's body till his joints cracked.

"You will tell us what we want to know," said the Rogan, glaring coldly down at him.

Dex compressed his lips stubbornly. He couldn't tell them if he wanted to, and, by God, he wouldn't if he could.

Another notch, the wheel was turned; and in spite of himself a groan escaped Dex's lips. One more notch, while the metal slide-rods beneath him lengthened a fraction of an inch. . . .

CHAPTER VI

The Inquisition

BLIND, animal fear caught Dex and shook him in its grip. Then rage filled his heart, driving out the fear as a gale dissipates fog. With pain-dimmed eyes he glared at the gangling, hateful figure that gazed down on him with icy eyes. If he could only blast that monstrous, physically feeble but mentally ferocious thing to bits! Annihilate it! Blow it to the four corners of Jupiter! And all the other Rogans with it!

And with this thought he suddenly saw, through the red mists of rage, the shock-tube that was dangling indifferently from the Rogan leader's hand.

Instantly the red mists began to clear away. Another change took place in the tortured lieutenant's mind. The blind hot rage faded into more deadly, cold wrath. A plan began to bud into thought. It was a futile plan, really. It could not possibly accomplish anything vital. But it *might* give him a chance for a little revenge before his life was snuffed out—might give him a chance to strike a blow for the dead Journeyman and the other gallant explorers who had perished here in this chamber before him.

He closed his eyes to hide the hate and calculation in them. The tall Rogan leaned lower over the rack.

"You are ready to do as I command?" he demanded.

"Yes," whispered Dex. "Yes."

In the beautiful Greca's eyes, as she translated his assent, was horror. But then, faintly, her mind caught the thought that lay beneath the Earthman's apparent surrender. She veiled her own eyes with long lashes, lest they betray the captive's plan to the alert Rogan. Her lips moved silently; perhaps she was praying to her Great White One.

"RELEASE him," the Rogan ordered, triumph in his birdlike, shrill voice. The metal hoops were unfastened. Dex stretched his outraged body, wincing with the pain of movement; then felt life and strength returning to him.

"Come with us to the motor," commanded the Rogan, his dull eyes glinting in anticipation of learning the coveted secret that should add one more planet to the Rogan's tyranny.

Dex walked to the dismantled atomic engine with him. He walked slowly, pretending more stiffness and weakness than he really owned to. No use in letting his captors know that his resilient muscles were so quickly throwing off the torment of the rack.

As he walked he kept his gaze covertly on that shock-tube that dangled in the leader's grasp. The rest of the guard had none; they had laid their weapons down on a

far bench on their entrance to the chamber, depending on the one with which their leader was armed.

Eagerly the Rogans crowded around Dex and the motor that had thus far baffled them. They bent down from their twelve-foot heights to bring their staring goggle-eyes closer to the lesson in atomic motive power, till Dex was in a sort of small dome of Rogans, with their long, pipe-like legs forming the wall around him, and their thin torsos inclining forward to make a curved ceiling over him.

The Rogan leader drew Greca within the circle to interpret the Earthman's explanations.

Dex moved a trifle, to bring himself nearer the tall leader. Again he glanced covertly at the shock-tube.

"The first thing to tell about our motor," said Dex, stalling for time, "is that it utilizes the breaking up of the atom as its source of power."

HE edged closer to the Rogan leader.

"You see those electrodes?" he said, pointing to two copper castings in a chamber between the fuel tank and the small but enormously powerful turbine that whirled with the released atomic energy. The Rogan leader blinked assent. His small, horrible mouth was pursed with his concentration of thought.

"The electrodes partially break down the atoms of fuel passing from the tank," explained Dex, desperately attempting scientific phraseology for a matter as far over his head as the remote stars. He raised his hand a trifle, bringing it nearer the Rogan's tube. . . .

"Is that the outlet from the tank," inquired the Rogan, pointing with the tube, and so raising it out of Dex's reach.

"Yes," mumbled Dex, sick with disappointment: he'd been on the point of leaping for the weapon. He sidled close again. Greca bit her lips lest she cry out with suspense.

"The partially disintegrated atoms pass into the turbine chamber," he went on, "and are there completely broken down by heat, which has been generated by the explosive energy of the atoms passing in before them."

"I warn you to speak true," said the leader, suddenly removing his gaze from the specimen motor and staring icily down at Dex. Dex's hand dropped abruptly from its place near the tube. Again his fingers had come within a foot of it.

"WE will get ahead faster," piped the Rogan, an edge of suspicion sounding in his shrill voice, "if I conduct the explanation. I will ask questions for you to answer. What is the fuel used?"

"Powdered zinc," Dex answered promptly. No harm in admitting that. The Rogans must already know it; zinc was common to Jupiter, as Earth spectroscopes had showed long since; and they had no doubt analyzed it by now. The chances were that the leader was merely testing him, to see if he were sincere in his ostensible surrender.

That his guess was right, he read in the fishy, dull eyes. The Rogan leader nodded at his answer, and some of the lurking suspicion in his gaze died down.

"How is it prepared?"

Now this marked the beginning of the end, Dex knew. The preparation of the powdered metal was half the secret of atomic power—and Dex hadn't the faintest idea what it was! This questions-and-answers affair was going to pin him down in short order!

"How is it prepared?" repeated the Rogan leader inexorably. "Tell us, or—"

But at that instant Dex attained his objective.

Once more his hand had crawled slowly toward the tube—till, once more, it was within reach. Then, more bold as his position grew more desperate, he straightened up—and, with a lightning move, had wrenched it from the sucker-disk that held it!

He shouted his triumph. He had it! *Now* let the devils put him back on the torture bed if they could! *Now* let them try to make him betray his planet!

THERE was an alarmed squeak from the Rogan leader, and in an instant the huge laboratory was in an uproar. The Rogan guards whipped their hose-like arms toward the Earthman. Dex, with a sweep of his hands, knocked the pipe-stem legs of two of the guards from under them, leaped over their bodies, and stood at bay in a corner—guarding the bench on which the guards had laid their tubes when they filed into the laboratory.

The air resounded with the shrill calls of the excited Rogans. Then they began to close in on him, all the while eyeing the tube in his hand with terror written large on their hideous faces.

Dex's eyes blazed with the light of vengeful exultation. For the death of Journeyman and the rest, for the coming inevitable death of himself and Brand, he was going to pay—at least in part—with the captured tube of death in his hand! It was a lovely thought, and for a few seconds he delayed acting in order to savor it.

Then, with a smile of pure happiness, he leveled the tube at the nearest Rogan, in order to shrivel him to nothingness as he had seen the slave shrivelled in the street.

The Rogan did not fall! Full in the face of the death tube he teetered forward, his arms reaching savagely toward the Earthman.

Dex stared incredulously. Cold fear crept into his heart. He pointed the tube more accurately, and squeezed harder on the coil handle. Still nothing happened. The Rogans warily drew closer.

PERSPIRATION began to trickle down Dex's cheeks. In God's name, why didn't the tube work? He had thought all he had to do was point it and squeeze down on the handle. But evidently there was more to the trick than that!

He groaned. He had staged all this elaborate play for a weapon as useless to his untrained mind as one of Earth's explosive guns, with the safety-lock clamped on, would have been to an abysmal Venusian savage!

By now the nearest Rogan was within reaching distance of him. One of its two pairs of slimy arms uncoiled toward him. The other pair strained to reach around him and get to the weapons on the bench by his side.

With a cry, Dex dashed the useless shock-tube down on the reaching arms. As long as he didn't know how to work it anyway, he might as well use it as a club.

The Rogan squeaked with pain; the arms recoiled. Dex jerked the tube back over his shoulder for another blow. . . .

There was a shriek from the doomed wretch fastened to the metal plate. The slave that had been tortured before Dex's eyes as an object lesson! He had been returned to consciousness a short time since, and had been writhing and shuddering against the plate.

Dex flashed a glance at him over his shoulder, as he shrieked, and cried aloud himself at what he saw.

THE tortured slave was rapidly disappearing! Another shriek left his lips, to be broken off halfway. In an instant nothing was left

of the struggling body but a wisp of greasy black smoke!

Dex stared stupidly at the tube in his hand. Then, as a squeak of agony sounded from a Rogan in front of him, his mind grasped what had happened. Somehow its mechanism had been jarred into functioning when he dashed it against the groping arm. In some way its death dealing power had been unleashed. With a cry of exultation, Dex began to use it!

The Rogan in front of him, squealing, collapsed on the floor, dwindling swiftly into nothingness. Dex turned the mysterious death against another teetering creature. It too went up in oleaginous smoke.

The Rogan leader came next. Dex whirled the tube in his direction and saw him go down. Then he sprang to annihilate still another grotesque monster who had almost reached the bench on which were the other tubes. He shouted and raved as this fourth Rogan crumbled. Torture him, would they! Plan to capture Earth, would they! He'd kill off the whole damned population with this tube!

The Rogan survivors, squeaking in panic, gave over their attempts to retrieve the tubes. They dove for various hiding places—under benches, behind retorts, anywhere to get away from the terror running amuck in their midst. And after them sprang Dex, mad with his sudden miraculous success, to ferret them out one by one and blow them into hell with their own horrible death-engine.

IN his ecstasy of rage, Dex overlooked the Rogan leader. He had seen that attenuated monstrosity go down, and had assumed he was dead. But such was not the case. In the corner Dex had vacated when he sprang after the fleeing guard, the tall leader twisted feebly and sat up.

One of his four arms was missing, a smoking stump showing where the annihilating ray from the tube had blasted it off at the shoulder. But he was far from being dead. With cold purpose in his great staring eyes, he moved snakily toward the bench Dex had now left unguarded.

The Earthman got another Rogan; whirled to track down still another. Promptly the leader sank motionless to the floor. The Rogan leader continued his crawling. He reached the bench, fumbled up and along its surface for the nearest tube.

Dex, unconscious of the sure fate gathering behind him to strike him down, dashed past a great glass tank behind which Greca was huddling in mortal fear, and charged down on two more of the squeaking guards.

Then, suddenly, some sixth sense warned him that something was wrong. He whirled toward the corner he had left.

The Rogan leader, two of his surviving arms propping feebly against the bench, was pointing a shock-tube squarely at him!

DEX fell to the floor to escape the first discharge of the tube, and leveled his own. He felt the thing grow hot in his hand, saw a blinding blue-white fire leap into being in the space between them as the rays from the two tubes met and absorbed each other. He shifted, to get out of the line and blast the creature he had too hastily reckoned as dead. But he was not quick enough. A fraction before him, the Rogan leader shifted.

Dex felt a terrible burning sensation all over his body, as the ray from his tube met the conflicting ray less squarely, and allowed a little of it to reach him. He shrieked as the slave had shrieked when he felt the annihilating cur-

ent from the plate sweeping through his body.

A black fog seemed to close in around the Earthman's senses. He crashed to the floor, with a glimpse of the leering triumph on the Rogan's face as the last picture to stamp itself in his failing consciousness.

The tall Rogan, obviously in great agony from his blasted arm, squeaked a faint command. The four guards who were left issued fearfully from their hiding places and came to him.

He pointed his tube at Dex Harlow, lying unconscious on the floor. There he hesitated an instant, his soft little mouth slobbering in his rage and pain. Then he let the tube sink slowly off its line.

He gave another command. The four guards picked the Earthman up and carried him to the metal torture-plate on which the slave had met his death. The tall leader's eyes gleamed with vicious hatred as the limp body was fastened to the metal.

Mouthing and squealing with the pain of his seared arm-stump, he wobbled toward the lever, a mere turn of which would readily convert the plate into a bed of agony.

CHAPTER VII

In the Power-House

ALONE in the prison room, after Dex had been dragged away to be subjected to the Rogan inquisition, Brand gnawed at his fingers and paced distractedly up and down the stone flooring. For a while he had no coherent thought at all; only the realization that his turn came next, and that the Rogans would leave no refinement of torment untried in their effort to wring from him the secret of the atomic engine.

He went to the window, and absent-mindedly stared out. The whining hum from the great domed building off to the right, like the high-pitched droning of a swarm of gargantuan bees, came to his ears. He listened more intently, and leaned out of the window to look at the building.

Under that dome, it came to him again, was, in all probability, the mainspring of the Rogan mechanical power. If only he could get in there and look around! He might do some important damage; he might be able to harass the enemy materially before the time came for him to die.

He leaned farther out of the window, and examined the hundred feet or so of sheer wall beneath him. He saw, scrutinizing it intently, that the stone blocks that composed it were not smooth cut, but rough hewn, with the marks of the cutters' chisels plainly in evidence. Also there was a considerable ridge between each layer of blocks where the Rogans' mortar had squeezed out in the process of laying the wall.

Never in sanity would a man have thought of the thing Brand considered then. To attempt to clamber down that blank wall, with only the slight roughness of the protruding layers of mortar to hang on to, was palpable suicide!

BRAND shrugged. He observed that to a man already condemned to death, the facing of probable suicide shouldn't mean much.

With scarcely an increase in the beating of his heart, he swung one leg out over the broad sill. If he fell, he escaped an infinitely worse death; if he didn't fall, he might somehow win his way into that domed building whence the hum came.

Cautiously, clutching at the rough stone with finger tips that in a moment or two became raw and bleed-

ing masses, he began his slow descent. As he worked his way down, he slanted to the right, toward the near wall of the retaining yard whose end was formed by the round structure that was his goal.

Beneath him and to the left the broad street swarmed with figures: the tall ones of the Rogans and the shorter, sturdier ones of slaves. Any one of those dozens of grotesque pedestrians might glance up, see him, and pick him off with the deadly tubes. Under his fingers the mortar crumbled and left him hanging, more than once, by one hand. For fully five minutes his life hung by a thread apt to be severed at any time. But—he made it. Helped by the decreased gravity of the red spot, and released from inhibiting fear by the fact that he was already, figuratively, a dead man, he performed the incredible.

With a last slithering step downward, he landed lightly on the near wall of the enclosure, and started along its broad top toward his objective.

Now he was in plain sight of any one who might be looking out the windows of the tower building or from the dome ahead of him; but this was a chance he had to take, and at least he was concealed from the swarms in the street. Making no effort to hide himself by crawling along the top of the wall, he straightened up and began to run toward the giant dome.

HARDLY had he gone a dozen steps when he suddenly understood the meaning of the high-walled enclosure to his right!

Off in a far corner rose a slate colored mound that at first glance he had taken for a great heap of inanimate dirt. The mound began to move toward him—and metamorphosed into an animal, a thing that made Brand blink his eyes to see if he were dreaming, and then stop, appalled, to look at it.

He saw a body that dwarfed the high retaining walls to comparative insignificance. It had a tree-like tail that dragged behind it; and a thirty-foot, serpentine neck at the end of which was a head like a sugar barrel that split into cavernous jaws lined with backward-pointing teeth. Two eyes were set wide apart in the enormous head, eyes that were dead and cold and dull, yet glinting with senseless ferocity. It was the sort of thing one sees in delirium.

With increasing energy the creature made for him, till finally it was approaching his sector of the wall at a lumbering run that was rapid for all its ungainliness.

It was apparent at a glance that the snaky neck, perched atop the lofty shoulder structure, would raise the head with its gaping jaws to his level on the wall! Brand ran. And after him thudded the gigantic lizard, its neck arching up and along the wall to reach him.

A scant five yards ahead of the snapping jaws, Brand reached his goal, the dome, and clambered over its curved metal room away from the monster's maw.

He stopped to pant for breath and wipe the sweat from his streaming face. "Thank God it didn't get me," he breathed, looking back at the bellowing terror that had pursued him. "Wonder why it's there? It's too ferocious to be tamed and used in any way: it must be kept as a threat to hold the slaves in hand. It certainly looks well fed. . . ."

He shuddered; then he began to explore the dome of the building for a means of entrance.

THERE was no opening in the roof. A solid sheet of reddish metal, like a titanic half-eggshell, it glittered under him in an unbroken piece.

He crept down its increasingly precipitous edge till he reached a sort of cornice that formed a jutting circle of stone around it. There he leaned far over and saw, about ten feet below him, a round opening like a big port-hole. From it were streaming waves of warm, foul air, from which he judged it to be a ventilator outlet.

He scrambled over the edge of the cornice, hung at arm's length, and swung himself down into the opening. And there, perched high up under the roof, he looked down at an enigmatic, eery scene.

That the structure was indeed a strange sort of power-house was instantly made evident. But what curious, mysterious, and yet bewilderingly simple machinery it held!

In the center was a titanic coil of reddish metal formed by a single cable nearly a yard through. Around this, at the four corners of the compass, were set coils that were identical in structure but a trifle smaller. From the smaller coils to the larger streamed, unceasingly, blue waves of light like lightning bolts.

Along a large arc of the wall was a stone slab set with an endless array of switches and insulated control-buttons. Gauges and indicators of all kinds, whose purpose could not even be guessed at, were lined above and below, all throbbing rhythmically to the leap of the electric-blue rays between the monster coils.

ALMOST under Brand's perch a great square beam of metal came through the building wall from outside, to be split into multitudinous smaller beams that were hooked up with the bases of the coils. Across from him, disappearing out through the opposite wall, was an identical beam.

"The terminals for the metal plate system that extends over the whole red spot," murmured Brand. "This building *is* important. But what can I do to throw sand in the gears before I'm caught and killed. . . ?"

He surveyed the great round room below him more thoroughly. New he saw, right in the center of the huge control board, a solitary lever that seemed a sort of parent to all the other levers and switches. It was flanked by a perfect army of gauges and indicators; and was covered by a glass bell which was securely bolted to the rock slab.

"That looks interesting," Brand told himself. "I'd like to see that closer, if I can climb down from here without being observed. . Why"—he broke off—"where everybody!"

For the first time, in the excitement and concentration of his purpose, the emptiness of the place struck him. There was no sign of light in the great building—no workmen or slaves anywhere. There was just the great coils, with the streamers of blue light bridging them and emitting the high-pitched, monotonous hum audible outside the dome, and the complicated control board with its quivering indicator needles and mysterious levers. That was all.

"Must be out to lunch," muttered Brand, his eyes going fascinatedly toward that solitary, parent lever under its glass bell. "Well, it gives me a chance to try some experiments, anyway."

IT was about fifty feet from his perch to the floor; but a few feet to one side was a metal beam that extended up to help support the trussed weight of the roof. He jumped for this, and quickly slid down it.

He started on a run for the control board; but almost immediately

he stopped warily to listen: it seemed to him that he had caught, faintly, the squeaking, high tones of Rogan conversation.

Miraculously, the sound seemed to come from a blank wall to his left. He crept forward to investigate. . . .

The mystery was solved before he had gone very far. There was an opening in the wall leading off to an annex of some kind outside the dome building. The opening was concealed by a set-back, so that at first glance it had seemed part of the wall itself. From this opening drifted the chatter of Rogans.

Brand stole closer, finally venturing to peer into the room beyond from an angle where he himself could not be seen. And he found that his whimsical reference to "lunch" had contained a ghastly element of fact!

In that annex were several dozen of the teetering, attenuated Rogans, and an equal number of slaves. And the relation of the slaves and the Rogans was one that made Brand's skin crawl.

Each Rogan had stripped the tunic from the chest of his slave. Now, as Brand watched, each drew a keen blade from his belt, and made a shallow gash in the shrinking flesh. There were a few stifled screams—some of the slaves were women—but for the most part the slashing was endured in stoical silence. When red drops began to ooze forth, the Rogans stooped and applied their horrible little mouths to the incisions. . . .

"The slimy devils!" Brand whispered hoarsely, at sight of that dreadful feeding. "The inhuman, monstrous vermin!"

But now one or two of the Rogans had begun to utter squeaks of satiation; and Brand hastened away from there and toward the control board again. He hadn't an idea of what he might accomplish when he reached it; he didn't know but that a touch of the significant looking parent-lever might blast him to bits; but he did know that he was going to raise absolute hell with something, somewhere, if he possibly could.

SWIFTLY he approached the great master-lever, protected by its bell of glass. (At least it looked like glass, for it was crystal clear and reflected gleamingly the blue light from the nearby coils). He tapped it experimentally with his knuckles. . . .

At once pandemonium reigned in the great vaulted building. There was a siren-like screaming from a device he noticed for the first time attached under the domed roof. A clanging alarm split the air from half a dozen gongs set around the upper walls.

Squealing shouts sounded behind Brand. He whirled, and saw the Rogans, interrupted in their terrible meal, pouring in from the annex and racing toward him. Rage and fear distorted their hideous faces as they pointed first to the big lever and then at the escaped Earthman. They redoubled their efforts to get at him, their long unsteady legs covering the distance in great bounds.

Brand swore. Was he to be caught again before he had accomplished a certain thing? When he had already managed to win clear to his objective?

He hammered at the glass bell with his fists, but realized with the first blow that he was only wasting time trying to crack it barehanded. He glanced quickly about and saw a metal bar propped up against the control board near him.

HE sprang for it, grasped it as a club, and returned to the glass bell. Raising his arms high, he brought the thick metal bar

down on the glass with all his strength.

With a force that almost wrenched his arms from their sockets, the bar rebounded from the glass bell, leaving it uncracked.

"Unbreakable!" groaned Brand.

Desperately he tried again, whirling the bar high over his head and bringing it smashing down. The result was the same as before as far as breaking the bell was concerned. But—a little trickle of crushed rock came from around the bolts in the slab to which the bell was fastened.

A third time be brought the bar down. The glass bell sagged a bit away from the slab. . . .

He had no chance for more assaults on it. The nearest Rogans had leaped for him. Slimy arms were coiling around him, while the loathsome sucker-disks tore at his unprotected face and throat.

Savagely Brand lashed out with the bar. It caved in a pair of the long, skinny legs, bringing a bloated round head down within reach. He smashed it with the bar, exulting grimly as the blow crumpled bone and flesh almost down to the little mouth which was yet carmine from its recent feeding.

The process seemed a sound one to Brand, unable as he was to reach the Rogans' heads that towered six feet above his own. Methodically, swinging the bar with of the weight of his body behind it, he repeated the example. First a crash of the bar against a pair of legs, then the crushing in of the Rogan's head when he toppled with agonized squeals to the floor.

Again and again he crushed the life out of a Rogan with his one-two swing of the deadly bar. They were thinning down, now. They were wavering in their charges against the comparatively insignificant being from another planet who was defending himself so fiercely.

FINALLY one of their number turned and ran toward an exit, waving his four arms and adding his high-pitched alarms to the incessant ringing of the gongs and shrieks of the warning siren up under the roof. The rest rushed the Earthman in a body.

Steadily, almost joyfully, Brand fought on. He had expected to be annihilated by one of the Rogan shock-tubes long before now; but as yet there was no sign of any. Either these Rogan workmen were not privileged to carry the terrible things, or they were too occupied to think of going and getting them; anyhow, Brand was left free to wield his bar and continue crushing out the lives of the two-legged vermin that attacked him.

With almost a shock of surprise, he saw finally that he had battered their number down to three. At that he took the offensive himself. He rammed the bluntly pointed end of the bar almost through one writhing torso, broke the back of a second with a whistling blow, and tripped and exterminated the third almost in as many seconds. The creatures, without their death-tubes, were as helpless as crippled rats!

Panting, he turned again toward the loosened glass bell, and battered at it with the precious bar. Gradually the bolts that held it to the stone slab were wrenched out, till only one supported it. But at this point, from half a dozen setback doorways, streams of infuriated Rogans began pouring into the building and toward him.

The one that had fled had come back with help.

CHAPTER VIII

Tremendous Odds

LIKE living spokes of a half-wheel, with the Earthman as the hub, the Rogans converged to-

ward Brand, a howling roar outside indicating that there were hundreds more waiting to jam into the dome as soon as they were able. There were still no shock-tubes in evidence; evidently the worker who had gone for help had gathered the first Rogan citizens he had encountered on the streets. But the very numbers of the mob spelled defeat for Brand.

However, there was still the great lever behind him to yank away from its switch-socket. The glass bell was almost off now. With a last mad blow, he knocked loose the remaining bolt that held it. The bell clattered to the floor.

A concerted shriek came from the crowding Rogans as they saw the Earthman's hand close on the lever. Whatever effect the throwing of that master-switch could have, there was no doubt that they were extremely anxious to prevent it!

And now, in the rear of the crowding columns, appeared Rogans taller than the others, with an authoritative air, who waved before them, eager to unleash their power batteries of the death-tubes.

Resigning himself to annihilation in the next instant, Brand pulled down hard on the lever.

THE effect wrought by the throwing of that great switch was almost indescribable.

In a flash, as though all had been struck at once by a giant's hand, every Rogan in the mob shot toward the floor, long thin legs caving under him as if turned to water. Writhing feebly, they endeavored to get up, but could not; and, still weakly ferocious, began to creep toward the Earthman like huge-headed worms.

Brand himself had been thrown to the floor with the falling of that switch. He had felt as though an invisible ocean had been poured on him, weighting him down intolerably. To move arms or legs required enormous effort; and to get up on his feet again was like rising under a two-hundred-pound pack.

The movement of the switch, he saw, had cut off the gravity reducing apparatus of the Rogans—whatever that might consist of. They were now, abruptly, subjected to the full force of gravity exerted by Jupiter's great mass. They could no more stand erect on their tottering, lofty legs than they could fly.

But, though greatly handicapped by the gravity pull, they were still not entirely helpless. Like huge, long insects they continued to worm their way toward Brand, using their four arms and their boneless legs to help urge them over the flooring. And in their rear the Rogan guards struggled to lift their tubes and level them at the escaped prisoner.

Prompt to avoid that, Brand went down on his hands and knees. Thus he was shielded by the foremost crawling Rogans: the ones in the rear, with the tubes, could not raise themselves high enough to bore down over their fellows' heads at the Earthman.

Squatting on his knees, Brand awaited the first resolute crawlers. And, on his knees, whirling the now thrice weighty bar at heads that were conveniently low enough to be accessible, he began his last stand.

ON the Rogans came, evidently determined, at any sacrifice of life, to get the Earthman away from that vital control board. And to right and left, crouching low to escape the tubes of the guards slowly crawling forward from the rear, Brand laid about him with the bar.

He got a little sick at the havoc he was wreaking on these slow-moving, gravity-crippled things; but

remembrance of their grisly feeding habits, and the torture they must by now have inflicted on Dex, kept him flailing down on soft heads with undiminished effort.

With the gravity pull what it was, the Earthman was immeasurably stronger than any individual Rogan. For a time the contest was all in his favor. It was like killing slugs in a rose garden!

Nevertheless, these slugs were, after all, twelve feet long and possessed of intelligence, besides being hundreds in number. After a while the tide of battle began to turn in their favor.

Brand began to feel his arms ache burningly with the sustained effort of wielding a weapon that now weighed about twenty-five pounds. He knew he couldn't keep up the terrific strain much longer. And, in addition, he could see that the armed Rogans in the rear were steadily forging ahead among the unarmed attackers, till they soon must be in a position to blast him with their weapons.

Brand brought down his bar, with failing force but still deadly effect, on the loathsome face of the nearest Rogan, grunting with satisfaction as he saw it crumple into a shapeless mass. He thrust it, spear-like, into another face, and another.

Then, abruptly, he found himself weaponless.

Raising it high to bring it down on an attacker who was almost about to seize him, he felt the metal bar turn white hot, and dropped it with a cry as it seared the skin from the palms of his hands. Some Rogan guard in the rear had managed to train his tube on the bar; and in the instant of its rising had almost melted it.

WEAPONLESS and helpless, Brand crawled slowly back before the tortuously advancing mob, keeping close enough to them to be shielded from the tubes of the rear guards. Without his club he knew the end was a matter of seconds.

He had an impulse to leap full into the mass of repulsive, crawling bodies and die fighting as his fists battered at the gruesome faces. But a second impulse, and a stronger one, was the blind instinct to preserve his life as long as possible.

Hesitantly, almost reluctantly, acting on the primitive instinct of self-preservation, he continued to back away from the advancing horde; away from the switch and toward the rear of the dome.

With the instant of his withdrawal, a Rogan turned toward the lever to push it back up into contact and release the red kingdom from the burden of Jupiter's unendurable gravity. And now ensued a curious struggle.

The lever, placed for the convenience of creatures twelve feet or more tall, was about five feet from the floor. And the Rogan couldn't reach it!

STUBBORNLY he heaved and writhed in an effort to raise his inordinately heavy body from the floor to a point where one of the weaving arms could reach the switch. But the pipe-stem legs would not bear its weight. Each time it nearly reached the lever, only to fall feebly back again in a snarl of tangled limbs.

Meanwhile, Brand had flashed a quick look back over his shoulder to see, in the wall behind him, a metal door he hadn't noticed before. He found time for a flashing instant to wonder why there were no Rogans entering from that doorway, too; but it was a vain wonder, and it faded from his mind as the ever advancing, groping monsters before him kept crowding him back.

Instinctively he changed his course a trifle, to edge toward the

metal door. Perhaps, behind it, there was sanctuary for a few moments. Perhaps he could force it open, spring out, and bar it again in the faces of the pursuing mob. It sounded improbable, but at least it offered him a slim chance where before no chance had seemed possible.

He reached the door at last, fumbled behind him and felt, high over his head, a massive sliding bolt.

IN the spot Brand had left, the struggle to throw the gravity-lever back into closed contact position went on. The Rogan who was fruitlessly trying to reach up to it, paused and said something to one near him. That one halted, and began to crawl toward him.

The two of them tried to reach it, one bracing the other and helping him pry his body up from the implacable pull of Jupiter's uninsulated mass. The top Rogan reached a little higher. The flesh sucker-disk that served as a hand almost grasped the lever, but failed by only a few inches.

A third Rogan crawled up. And now, with two arching their backs to help the other, the thing was done. The hose-like, groping arm went up and pushed the lever back into place.

The blue streamers began to hum and crackle from coil to coil again. The invisible weight that pressed down was released as once more the giant planet's gravity was nullified. The Rogans got eagerly to their feet and began to race toward Brand in their normal long bounds.

Brand, just cautiously rising when the power went back on, found himself leaping five feet into the air with the excess of his muscular effort. And in that leap he saw the Rogans in the rear straighten up and point their tubes. However, also in that leap, his fumbling hand shot back the bolt that securely shut the metal door.

With a shout of defiance he jumped out of the door and slammed it shut after him, feeling it grow searing hot an instant later under the impact of the rays from the tubes that had been trained on him.

A stinging shock reached him through the metal, flinging him to the ground. He rolled out of its range and leaped to his feet to race away from there. Then, with a gasp, he flattened his body back against the wall of the dome building.

He was in the enclosure that held the gigantic, lizard-like thing that had nearly got him on his escape from the tower room.

He wheeled frantically to go back and face the Rogan death-tubes. Anything rather than wait while that mammoth heap of tiny-brained ferocity ran him down and tore him to shreds! But even as he turned, he heard the bolt shoot home on the inside of the door; heard vengeful squeals of triumph from his pursuers.

AT the other end of the enclosure, near the foot of the tower building, the great lizard eyed him unblinkingly, its tremendous jaws gaping to reveal a cavernous mouth that was hideously lined with bright orange colored membrane. Then, squatting lower with every step it took, like a mountainous cat about to spring on its prey, it began to stalk on its tree-like legs toward the tiny creature that had leaped into its yard with it.

Brand whirled this way and that, mechanically seeking a way out. There was none. The walls of the great enclosure were not like the wall of the tower. Here were no rough hewn stones, with protruding ridges of mortar set between. These walls were as smooth as glass, and

just as smooth was the curved wall of the dome building behind him.

The monstrous beast stalked nearer, almost on its belly now. As it advanced, the great tail stirred up a cloud of reddish dust, and left behind it a round deep depression in a surface already criss-crossed with a multitude of similar depressions. A bellowing hiss came from its gaping mouth, and it increased its pace to a thunderous, waddling rush.

CHAPTER IX

Into the Enclosure

IN the torture chamber Dex wavered slowly back to consciousness to get the growing impression that he was being immersed in a bath of liquid fire. Burning, intolerable pain assailed him with increasing intensity as his senses clarified.

At last he groaned and opened his eyes, for the moment not knowing where he was nor how he had come to be there. He saw strange torture instruments and tall monstrosities with pumpkin-shaped heads surrounding him closely in a semicircle, and staring at him out of great dull eyes.

Remembrance came back with a rush, and he gathered his muscles to spring at the hateful figures. But he could not move. At waist and throat, at wrists and ankles, were hoops of metal. He closed his eyes again while the burning waves of invisible fire shot through him recurrently from head to foot.

Dully he wondered that he was still alive. His last recollection had been of the Rogan leader pointing his shock-tube full at him, his shapeless countenance working with murderous fury. However, alive he was; and most unenviably so!

His hands, circumscribed to a few inches of movement by the bonds on his wrists, felt the smooth substance at his back. And with a thrill of horror he realized his position: he was crucified against the metal slab on which the slave had writhed in agony a short half hour ago.

Again he strained and tugged, vainly, to get free. Off to one side, pressed back against a huge glass experimental tank, he saw the beautiful Greca, her eyes wide with horror; and caught her frantic, pleading message to her "Great White One."

THE Rogan leader, squealing and grimacing, advanced toward the victim on the metal plate. One of the long arms went out and a sucker-disk was pressed to Dex's cheek. Dex quivered at the loathsome contact of that soft and slimy substance; then set his jaws to keep from groaning as the disk was jerked away, to carry with it a fragment of skin and flesh.

Gingerly, the tall leader felt the twitching, blackened stump of his blasted arm. Dex grinned mirthlessly at that: he'd struck one or two blows in his own defense, anyhow!

At sight of the Earthman's grin, an expression of defiance and grim joy that needed no interpreting to be understandable, the Rogan leader fairly danced with rage. His long arm went out to the switch beside the plate, and pulled it down another notch—just a little, not nearly to the current that had torn at the slave.

At the increased torment resulting from that slight movement of the regulating lever, Dex yelled aloud in spite of all his will power. It seemed as though his whole body were about to burst into self-generated flame. Every cell and fiber of him seemed on the verge of flying apart. He could feel his eyes start from his head, could feel every hair on his scalp stand up as though discharging electric sparks.

A minute or two of that and he would go mad! He cried out again, and twisted helplessly in his bonds. And then the terrible torture stopped.

The Rogan had not touched the switch—yet whatever sort of current it was that charged the plate was abruptly clicked off, as though someone at a distance had cut a wire or thrown a master-switch.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with its ceasing, an invisible, crushing sea seemed to envelope everything. Dex felt his body sag against his metal bonds as if it had been changed to lead.

Before him the Rogans, who had been crowding closer to watch gloatingly each grimace he made, shot floorward as though their pipe-stem legs had been swept from under them. The leader fell on the stump of his seared arm, and a deafening squeal of rage and pain came from his little mouth. His tube fell from his grasp and rolled over the floor half a dozen yards away from him.

Amazed, observing the stricken creatures only dimly through a haze of pain, Dex saw them struggle vainly to get up again, and heard them chattering excitedly to themselves. For the moment, in the face of this queer phenomenon, the prisoner seemed to be forgotten. And Dex was quick to seize the momentary advantage.

"Greca!" he called. "The tube! There—on the floor!"

The girl raised her head quickly, and followed his imploring gaze. Laboriously she started for the tube. At the same instant the Rogan leader began to feel around him for his lost weapon. Not finding it, he raised his head and glanced about for it. He saw the girl making her way toward it and, with a squeak of terror, began to crawl toward it himself.

HE was not quick enough. The girl, though not nearly as active under the increased pull of gravity as a person of Earth might be, was yet more agile than the Rogans. And she was the faster mover in this tortuous, snail-like race. While the Rogan leader was still several feet away, she retrieved the shock-tube.

"Kill him!" begged Dex. "And all the rest of the filthy creatures!"

With feminine horror of the thing that faced her, Greca hesitated an instant—a hesitation almost long enough to be fatal. Then, just as the Rogan leader was reaching savagely out for her, she leveled the tube at him and turned it to its full power.

One last thin squeal came from the Rogan's mouth, a squeal that cracked abruptly at its height. What had been its gangling body drifted up in inky smoke.

"The others!" called Dex. "Quick! Before they get their weapons—"

Greca swept the death-tube in a short arc in front of her, over the bodies of the remaining Rogans, as if spraying plants with a hose. One after another, toppling in swift succession like grotesque falling dominoes, the creatures sagged to the floor and melted away. That one small part of Jupiter's red spot, at least, was cleared of Rogan population.

LONG shudders racked Greca's body, and her lips were a bloodless line in her pallid face. But she did not go into womanly hysterics or swoon at the slaughter it had been her lot to inflict. Moving as quickly as she could, she went to the metal slab and began, with shaking fingers, to undo the fastenings that held Dex prisoner.

"Good girl," said Dex, patting her satiny bare shoulder as he stood free again. "You're a sport and a

gentleman. You don't understand the terms? They're Earth words, Greca, that carry the highest praise a man can give a woman. But let's get out of here before another gang comes and takes us again. Where can we hide?"

"I don't know any hiding places," confessed Greca despairingly. "The Rogans swarm everywhere. We will be seen the moment we try to leave here."

"Well, we'll hunt for a hole, anyway," said Dex. He essayed to walk. What with the tendency of his muscles to jerk and collapse with the aftermath of the torture he had endured, and the sudden and inexplicable increase in gravity that bore him down, he made heavy going of it. "First we'll go up and get Brand."

"Yes, yes," said Greca, a soft glow in her clear blue eyes. "Let us go quickly."

She started toward the door, panting with the effort of moving. But Dex halted an instant, to stoop and pick up another of the tubes.

"We might as well have one of these apiece," he said. "You've proved you have the grit to use one; and maybe the dirty rats will think twice about rushing us if we each have a load of death in our hands."

THEY made their way out of the torture laboratory, and up the incline to the street level. And it was just as they reached this that the burden of gravity under which they staggered was lifted from their shoulders as quickly as it had descended on them.

Dex raised his arms just in time to fend his body from a collision with the wall in front of him. "Now what!" he exclaimed.

Greca lifted her hand for silence, inclined her head, and listened intently. As she did so, Dex heard the same noise her quick ears had caught an instant before his: a distant pandemonium of ringing gongs and siren shrieks, and squealing cries of a multitude of agitated Rogans.

"What the devil—" began Dex. But again Greca raised her hand to silence him, and listened once more. As she listened, her sea-blue eyes grew wider and wider with horror. Then, frantically, she began to race down a long corridor away from the street door.

Dex hastened to follow her. "What is it?" he demanded, when he had caught up to her flying little feet. "This is not the way up to the room where Brand—"

"Your friend is not there," she interrupted. She explained swiftly, distractedly: "From the shouts of the Rogans I learn that he got into the great dome building, somehow, and then was driven into the pen of the. . . "

Dex could not get the next term she used. But her telepathic message of the peril she mentioned formed in his mind clearly enough.

He got a flashing brain picture of a great, high-walled yard with a monster in it of the kind he had caught a close-range glimpse a short while before. Also, he saw a blurred, tiny figure, running from wall to wall, that was Greca's imagining of Brand and his efforts to escape the enormous beast.

"Good heavens!" groaned Dex. "Penned in with one of the things they showed me while I was stretched on the rack! Are you sure, Greca?"

She nodded, and tried to run faster. "This way," she gasped, turning down a passage to the left that ended in a massive metal door. "This leads to the enclosure. Oh, if only we can be in time!"

Her slim fingers tore at a massive bolt that secured the door. "Here," said Dex, wrenching it open for her. And they stepped

out into thin sunlight, onto a hard surface of reddish ground that was crisscrossed with innumerable rounded furrows like the tracks old-fashioned, fifty-passenger airplane wheels used to make on soft landing fields.

GRECA shrieked, and pointed to the far end of the enclosure.

Down there, flattened against the wall of the dome building, was Brand. And waddling toward him with a tread that caused the ground to quiver, was a mate to the hideous creature the Rogans had used to terrify Dex in the torture chamber.

Dex leveled the tube he was carrying, swore, hit it frenziedly against his hand. "How do you work this damned thing, Greca— Oh! Like that! There—see if *that* puts a sting in your hide!"

The distant monster stopped its advance toward Brand. A raw white spot as big as a dinner plate leaped into being on one of its enormous hind legs. It whirled with an ear-splitting hiss, to see what thing was causing such pain in its rear. The frightful head whipped back at the end of the long neck, to nuzzle at the seared spot. Then the giant lizard turned toward Brand again.

A second time Dex pressed the central coil that formed the handle of the tube, as Greca had showed him how to do. A second time the ray shot down the field to flick a chunk of flesh weighing many pounds from the monster's flank. And this time it definitely abandoned the quarry behind it. With a scream like the keening of a dozen steam whistles, it charged back over its tracks toward the distant pigmies that were inflicting such exasperating punishment on it.

Dex swept the tube before him in a short half-circle. A smoking gash appeared suddenly in the vast fore-quarters of the monster. It stopped abruptly, its clawed feet plowing along the ground with the force of its momentum. An instant it stood there. Then, with its head swinging from side to side and lowered so that its looped neck dragged on the reddish, dusty ground, it began to back away from the source of its hurt, bellowing and hissing its rage and bewilderment.

"Brand!" shouted Dex. "This end! Run, while I hold the thing off!"

Brand began to race down the long enclosure, ten feet to a leap. The great lizard darted after him, like a cat after an escaping mouse; but a flick of the tube sent it bellowing and screaming back to its corner.

"Dex!" gasped Brand. "Thank God!"

For a moment he leaned, white and shaken, against the wall. Then Greca caught his hand in both of hers, and Dex put his arm supportingly around his shoulder. They retreated back through the doorway behind them, and slid the bolt across the metal door.

CHAPTER X

The "Tank Scheme"

"THANK God you came when you did," repeated Brand. Then, with a moment in which, figuratively, to get his feet back on earth, the wonder of Dex's appearance struck him.

"How did you manage to get away?" he asked. "I was sure—I thought—when they dragged you out of the tower room I wouldn't see you again—"

Rapidly Dex gave an account of his ordeal in the torture chamber, telling Brand in a few words how he had attempted to win free of the Rogans, how he had almost succeeded, only to be caught again

and clamped to the death-plate on the wall.

"But just as the big fellow was about to cook me for good and all," he concluded, "something happened to the current, and to the gravity at the same time—"

"That was when I pulled the lever in the dome building!" exclaimed Brand.

He told of what had befallen him in the Rogan power-house. "That lever, Dex!" he said swiftly. "It's the keynote of the whole business. It absolutely controls the pull of gravity, and Lord knows what else besides. If we could only get at it again! Perhaps we could not only shut it off so that Jupiter's pull would function again, but also reverse the process so its gravity would be *increased!* Think what that would mean! Every Rogan in the red empire stretched out and immovable, possibly crushed in by his own weight!"

"It's a wonderful thought," sighed Dex; while Greca's eyes glowed with a sudden hope for her enslaved race, "but I don't see how we could ever—"

He stopped; and glanced in alarm down the passage behind them. Greca and Brand, hearing the same soft noise, whirled to look, too.

FAR down the passage, just sneaking around the bend, was a group of Rogan guards, each armed with a death-tube.

"Back to the pen!" cried Brand.

He slid the bolt, and jerked the door open. They rushed into the walled enclosure again, the slamming of the door behind them cutting off the enraged squeals of the Rogans.

"This isn't going to mean anything but a short delay, I'm afraid," said Brand, clenching his fists in an agony of futility. "They'll be in here in a minute, and get us like trapped rats."

"Not before we get a lot of them," said Dex grimly.

"But that isn't enough, man! We don't want to die, no matter how decently we do it. We've won free, and stayed free this long; now, somehow, we've got to reach our ship and get back to Earth to warn them of the danger that hides here for our planet!"

He strode tensely up and down, smacking his fist into his palm. "The lever!" he exclaimed. "That lever! It's our only answer! If we could get to it. . . . But how can we? We couldn't break into the dome, now the Rogans are on the watch for us, with anything less than a charge of explosives. Or a tank. God, how I'd like to have an old-fashioned, fifty-ton army tank here now!"

Greca exclaimed aloud as Brand's fleeting mental picture of one of Earth's unwieldy, long-discarded war tanks registered on her brain.

"There is the great beast there," she said hesitantly, pointing a slim forefinger at the huge lizard that had backed into a far corner and was regarding them out of dull, savage eyes. Then she shook her head. "But that is impossible. Impossible!"

THE men stared at her, with dawning realization in their minds. Then they gazed at each other.

"Of course," said Brand. "Of course! Greca, you're marvelous! Wish we had a tank? Why, we've got one! A four-legged mountain of meat that ought to be able to plow through the side of that dome like a battering ram through cardboard!"

"But it's not possible," replied Greca, her head dropping dejectedly. "My people, as driven slaves, till the fields with great animals that were trapped in the surrounding jungles. They harness

other great animals to haul burdens. But none of the beasts are like *this* one. This kind cannot be tamed or harnessed. It is too ferocious. It is used only as a scourge of fear, to crush us into complete submission."

"Can't be tamed?" Brand said. "We'll see about that! Come on, Dex."

"Just a minute," said Dex. He flattened against the wall, motioning them to do the same. Then he leveled his tube at the door.

Slowly, cautiously, the door began to swing back; and the Rogan that Dex had heard fumbling with the bolt stuck his huge head out to locate the escaped prisoners.

Dex pressed the release coil of his tube. Without a sound, the Rogan slumped to the ground, a smoking cavity in its shoulders at the spot where its head had been set. In an instant the body, too, disappeared; an upward coiling wisp of black smoke marking its vanishing.

Another Rogan, tiptoeing out, met the same fate; and another. And then the door was banged shut again, and the bolt ground into place on the inside.

"That'll teach 'em to be careful how they try to rush us from *that* door," said Dex, through set teeth. "Now let's see if that tank scheme of ours can be worked."

HE picked up a tube dropped by one of the Rogans, and handed it to Brand; showing him which coil to press to get full force, as Greca had in turn informed him.

"Down the field," commanded Brand. "We'll go about thirty yards apart, and try to herd this brute back through the walls of the dome building. Once it's inside, we'll try to rush to the lever before the Rogans can down us, and jam the thing past its terminal peg and into reverse action. I don't know that there *is* a reverse to it—but we can try.

"Greca dear,"—the girl started at the warmth of his thought, and a faint pink rose to her pale cheeks —"you'd better stay by my side. Your place as hostage-priestess of your people wouldn't save you if those devils catch you now. Besides, you can keep your tube leveled at the doorway as we go, and discourage any Rogans who might pluck up courage to try coming out again."

They started down the field toward the nightmare thing that snarled and hissed in its corner. On one side of the big enclosure walked Brand, with Greca close beside him, glancing continuously over her shoulder at the rear door, and holding her tube in readiness to check any charge the Rogans might attempt to make from the tower building. On the other side, keeping an equal pace, advanced Dex.

With tubes of death as whips, and with death for themselves set as the stake for which they gambled, they went about their attempt to drive the brainless monster before them through the solid wall of the dome building. And there followed what was probably the strangest animal act the universe has ever witnessed.

THE first thing to do was to rout the enormous lizard out of the corner where sullen fear had sent it squatting. Dex contrived to do that by standing next to the wall at its side, and sending a searing ray that just touched the scaly, tremendously thick hide. The monster bellowed deafeningly, and, with a spot smoking on its flank, waddled sideways to the center of the field. Its head and swaying long neck faced the Earthmen and its back was against the wall of the dome building. To that extent, at least,

they had the creature placed; but they soon found that the struggle had only just begun.

Brand got far enough around to focus his tube on the tip of the huge tail, in an effort to swing the gigantic thing about. There was an unearthly shriek from the colossal beast, and a foot and a half of its tail disappeared.

"Careful," called Dex, his jaw set and grim as the monster lashed out in its wrath. "If you bore in too long with that tube there'll be nothing left of our tank but a cloud of smoke."

Brand nodded, wordlessly, walking on the balls of his feet like a boxer, holding himself ready to swerve the thing should it charge them. Which—next instant—it did!

With a whistling bellow it gathered its tons of weight and thundered with incredible quickness at the gnats that were stinging its flanks and tail.

Desperately Brand played the tube across the vast chest, scoring a smouldering gash in the scale-covered flesh just above the gash Dex had seared a few moments before.

"Sorry, old fellow," Brand muttered to the screaming beast. "We hate to bait you like this, but it has to be done. Come on, now, through that wall behind you, and give us a chance at the lever."

BUT through the wall behind it the vast creature, not unnaturally, refused to go! It darted from side to side. Backward and forward. Up to the wall, only to back bewilderedly away from it. And constantly the tubes flicked their blistering, maddening rays along its monstrous sides and tail as the Earthmen tried to guide it into the wall.

"Hope there's enough left of it to do the trick," said Brand, white-lipped. The monster was smoking in a dozen spots now, and several of the hump-like scales on its back had been burned away till the vast spine looked like a giant saw that was missing a third of its teeth. "God, I'm thinking we'll kill it before we can drive it through that wall!"

Greca nodded soberly, keeping her eyes on the distant door to their rear. Twice that door had been opened, and twice she had directed the death rays into its opening to mow down the gangling figures behind it. But she had said nothing of this to her man. He was busy enough with his own task!

"The door to the dome—" Dex shouted suddenly.

But Brand merely nodded, even as a discharge from his tube annihilated the Rogan that had appeared in the doorway before them. He had seen that door stealthily opening even before Dex had.

"It had better be soon, Dex!" he called. "Rogans in front of us—Rogans behind us—and—look out! On your side of the fence, there!"

Dex whirled in time to pick off a grotesque, pipe-like figure that had suddenly appeared on the broad wall of the enclosure. Then he turned to the frenzied problem of driving the monster through the building wall.

"The thing's going mad, Brand!" he cried, his voice high-pitched and brittle. "Watch out!"

IT was only too evident that his statement was true. The baited monster, harried blindly this way and that, hounded against the blank wall behind it by something that bit chunks of living flesh out of its legs and sides, was losing whatever instinctive mental balance it had ever had. Its dimly functioning brain, probably no larger than a walnut in that gigantic skull, ceased more and more to guide it.

With a rasping scream that set

the Earthmen's teeth on edge, it charged for the wall on Dex's side. Dex just managed to swerve it with a blast from the tube so prolonged that half its great lower jaw fell away.

At this the titanic thing went wholly, colossally mad! It whirled toward Brand, jerking around again as a searing on that side jarred its dull sensory nerves, then headed at last straight toward the stone wall of the dome building.

With the rays from both tubes flicking it like monstrous spurs, it charged insanely toward the bulge of the circular wall. With all its tons and tons of weight it crashed against the stonework There was a thunderous crackling noise, and the wall sagged in perceptibly, while the metal roof bent to accommodate the new curvature of its supporting beams.

The monstrous lizard, jerked off its huge legs by the impact, staggered up and retreated toward the two men. But again the maddening pain in its hindquarters sent it careening toward the building wall. This time it raised high up on its hind legs in a blind effort to climb over it. "God, it must be five stories tall!" ejaculated Brand. Thunderingly its forelegs came down on the edge of the roof.

THERE was another deafening crash of stone and shrieking of torn metal. Just under the cornice, the wall sagged away from the roof and the top rows of heavy stone blocks slithered inward.

"Again!" shouted Brand.

His tube was pointing almost continuously now at the metal door leading from the dome building. The Rogans inside, at the shocks that were battering down a section of their great building, were all trying to get out to the yard at once. In a stream they rushed for the doorway. And in loathsome heaps they fell at the impact of the ray and shriveled to nothingness on the bombarded threshold.

"Once more—" Brand repeated, his voice hoarse and tense.

And as though the monster heard and understood, it rushed again with all its vast weight and force against the wall in a mad effort to escape the things that were blasting the living flesh from its colossal framework.

This charge was the last. With a roaring crash a section of the building thirty yards across went back and down, leaving the massive roof to sag threateningly on its battered truss-work.

IT was as though the side of an ant-heap had been ripped away. Inside the domed building hundreds of Rogans ran this way and that on their elongated legs, squealing in their staccato, high-pitched tongue.

With blind fury the mad monster charged in through the gaping hole it had battered for itself. In all directions the Rogans scattered. Then an authoritative tall figure with a tube in each of its four sucker-disks, whipped out a command and pointed to the great coils which lay immediately in the berserk monster's path.

The command restored some sort of order. Losing their fear of the beast in their greater fear of the damage it might do, the Rogans massed to stop it before it could demolish the Rogan heart of power.

At this point Brand saw an opening of the kind he had been praying for. The Rogans had retreated before the terrific charge of the monster in such a way that the space between its vast bulk and the control board was clear.

"After me!" he shouted to Dex. "One of us has got to reach that lever while the creature's still there to shield us!"

The two Earthmen dashed through the jagged hole in the wall and raced to the control board just as the huge lizard, a smoking mass, sank to the floor. Brand gazed almost fearfully at the lever-slot.

Was there a reverse to the gravity-control action? There was room in the slot for the lever to be pulled down below the neutral point, if that meant anything. . . .

BEHIND them the great bulk of the dead lizard was disappearing with incredible quickness under the rays of the tubes directed on it. Now the pumpkin-shaped heads on the opposite side were visible through a fleeting glimpse of a skeleton that was like the framework of a skyscraper. And now the colossal bones themselves were melting, while over everything hung a pall of greasy black smoke.

"Hurry, for God's sake!" gasped Dex.

Brand threw down the lever till it stuck. At once that invisible ocean poured crushingly over them, throwing them to their knees and sweeping the Rogans flat on their hideous faces just as half a hundred tubes were flashing down to point at the Earthmen.

"More—if you can!" grated Dex, whirling this way and that and spraying the massed Rogans with his death-dealing tube. Dozens went up in smoke under that discharge; but other dozens remained to raise themselves laboriously and slowly level their suddenly ponderous weapons at the Earthmen.

Brand set his jaw and threw all his weight on the lever. It bent a little, caught at the neutral point—and then jammed down an appreciable distance beyond it.

INSTANTLY the blue streamers, that had stopped their humming progress from coil to coil with the movement of the switch to neutral, started again in reversed direction. And instantly the invisible ocean pressed down with appalling, devastating force.

Greca and Brand and Dex were flattened to the floor as if by blankets of lead. And the scattered Rogans about them ceased all movement whatever.

"Oh," sobbed Greca, fighting for breath. "Oh!"

"We can't stand this," panted Dex. "We've fixed the Rogans, all right. But we've fixed ourselves, too! That lever has to go up a bit."

Brand nodded, finding his head almost too heavy for his neck to move. Sweat beaded his forehead—sweat that trickled heavily off his face like drops of liquid metal.

With a tremendous struggle he got to his knees beneath the master-switch. There he found it impossible to raise his arms; but, leaning back against the control board and so getting a little support, he contrived to lift his body up enough to touch the down-slanting lever with his head and move it back along its slot a fraction of an inch. The giant coils hummed a note lower; and some of the smashing weight was relieved.

"That does it, I think," Brand panted, his voice husky with exhaustion and triumph.

He began to crawl laboriously toward the nearest street exit. "On our way!" he said vibrantly. "To the space ship! We leave for Earth at once!"

SLOWLY, fighting the sagging weight of their bodies, the two Earthmen inched their way to the street, helping Greca as they went. Among the sprawled forms of the Rogans they crept, with great dull eyes rolling helplessly to observe their progress, and with feeble squeals of rage and fear and malediction following their slow path.

On the street a strange and terrible sight met their eyes.

Strewn over the metal paving like wheat stalks crushed flat by a hurricane, were thousands of Rogans. Not a muscle of their pipe-like arms or legs could they move. But the gravity that crushed them rigidly to the ground did not quite hold motionless the shorter and more sturdily built slaves.

Among the thousands of squealing, panting Rogans that lay as though paralyzed on the metal paving, crawled equal thousands of Greca's enslaved people. Their eyes flamed with fanatic hate. And methodically—not knowing what had caused their loathed masters to be stricken helpless, and not caring as long as they *were* helpless—the slaves were seeking out the shock-tubes that here and there had fallen from the clutch of Rogan guards. Already many had found them; and everywhere gangling, slimy bodies were melting in oily black smoke that almost instantly vanished in thin air.

As it was in these streets and in the great square in the center of which rested the Earthmen's ship, just so, they knew, was it being repeated all over the red empire. Slowly crawling, fiercely exulting slaves were exterminating the tyrannous things that had held them so long in dreadful bondage! Before the sun should set on another flashing Jovian day there would be no Rogan left in the red spot.

"AND so it ends," said Brand with a great sigh. He moved over beside Greca, and touched her lovely bare shoulders. They were shaking convulsively, those shoulders; and she had buried her face in her hands to keep from gazing at the ghastly carnage.

Brand pressed her to him. "It's terrible—yes. But think what it means! The knell of all the Rogans has been sounded to-day. As soon as the secret of these death-tubes has been analyzed by our science and provided against, my friend and I will return from Earth with a force that shall clear the universe of the slimy devils. Meanwhile, your people are safe here; with the gravity what it is, no Rogan attacking hordes can land."

They crawled tortuously over the square to the space ship. Brand turned again to Greca; and now in his eyes was a look that needed no language of mind or tongue for its complete expression.

"Will you come to Earth with me, Greca, and stay by my side till we return to set your people in power again?"

Greca shook her head, slowly, reluctantly. "My people need leaders now. I must stay and help direct them in their new freedom. But you—you'll come back with the others from Earth?"

"Try and stop him!" grinned Dex. "And try and stop me, too! From what I know now of the way they grow 'em on your satellite"—his eyes rested on Greca's beauty with an admiration that turned her to rosy confusion—"I'd say I'd found the ideal spot to settle down in!"

Brand laughed. "He's answered for me, too. And now, a salute that is used on Earth to express a promise. . . ." He kissed her—to her utter astonishment and perplexity, but to her dawning pleasure. "Good-by for a little while."

The two Earthmen hoisted themselves heavily over the sill of the control room of their ship, and crawled inside.

They secured the trap-door, and turned on the air-rectifiers. Brand moved to the controls, waved to Greca, who was smiling at him through the glass panel, and pointed the ship on its triumphant, four hundred million mile journey home.

Pistol in hand, the two men watched the oncoming lights.

The Solar Magnet

By Capt. S. P. Meek

THE milling crowd in front of the Capitol suddenly grew quiet. A tall portly figure came out onto the porch of he building and stepped before a nicrophone erected on the steps. A attery of press ameras clicked. newsreel photographer ground way on his machine. Wild cheers rent the air. The President held up his hand for silence. As the cheering died away he spoke into the microphone.

"My countrymen," he said, "the Congress of the United States has met in extraordinary session and is ready to cope with the condition with which

Another episode in Dr. Bird's long scientific duel with his country's arch-enemy, Saranoff.

we are confronted. While they deliberate as to the steps to be taken, it is essential that you meet this danger, if it be a danger, with the bravery and the calm front which has always characterized the people of the United States in times of trial and danger. You may rest assured—"

A slightly built, inconspicuous man who had followed the President out onto the porch was surveying the crowd intently. He turned and spoke in an undertone to a second man who mysteriously appeared from nowhere as the first man spoke. He listened for a moment, nodded, and edged closer to the President. The first man slipped unobtrusively down the Capitol steps and mingled with the crowd.

"—that no steps will be neglected which may prove of value," went on the President. "The greatest scientists of the country have gathered in this city in conference and they undoubtedly will soon find a simple and natural explanation for what is happening. In the meantime—"

THE President paused. From the crowd in front of him came a sudden disturbance. A man sprang free of the crowd and broke through the restraining cordon of police. In his hand gleamed an ugly blue steel automatic pistol. Quickly he leveled it and fired. A puff of dust came from the Capitol. The bullet had landed a few inches from one of the lower windows, fifty feet from where the President stood. He raised his weapon for a second shot but it was never fired. The man who had come down the Capitol steps sprang forward like a cat and grasped the weapon. For a moment the two men struggled, but only for a moment. From the crowd, stunned for a moment by the sheer audacity of the attack, came a roar of rage. The police closed in about the struggling men but the crowd rolled over them like a wave. The captor shouted his identity and tried to display the gold badge of the secret service but the mob was in no state of mind to listen. The police were trampled underfoot and the would-be assassin torn from the hands of the secret service operative. Every man in reach tried to strike a blow. The secret service man was buffeted and thrown aside. Realizing that the affair had been taken out of his hands, he made his way to the rear of the Capitol where his badge gained him ready passage through the cordon of police. He entered the building and reappeared in a few moments by the side of the President.

TWO hours later he leaned forward in his chair in Dr. Bird's private laboratory in the Bureau of Standards and spoke earnestly.

"Dr. Bird," he said, "that bullet was never meant for the President. That man was after bigger game."

The famous scientist nodded thoughtfully.

"Even a very rotten pistol shot should have come closer to him," he replied. "He must have missed by a good forty feet."

"He missed by a matter of inches. Doctor, that bullet struck the Capitol only two inches from a window. In that window was standing a man. The bullet was intended for the occupant of that window. I was directly behind him when he raised his weapon for a second shot and I am sure of his aim. He deliberately ignored the President and aimed again at that window. That was when I tackled him."

"Who was standing there, Carnes?"

"*You* were, Doctor."

Dr. Bird whistled.

"Then you think that bullet was intended for me?"

"I am sure of it, Doctor. That fact proves one thing to me. You are right in your idea that this whole affair is man-made and not an acci-

dent of nature. The guiding intelligence back of it fears you more than he fears anyone else and he took this means to get rid of you unobtrusively. Attention was focused on the President. Your death would have been laid to accident. It was a clever thought."

"It does look that way, Carnes," said the doctor slowly. "If you are right, this incident confirms my opinion. There is only one man in the world clever enough to have disturbed the orderly course of the seasons, and such a plan for my assassination would appeal to his love of the dramatic."

"You mean—"

"Ivan Saranoff, of course."

"We are pretty sure that he hasn't got back to the United States, Doctor."

"You may be right but I am sure of nothing where that man is concerned. However, that fact has no bearing. He may be operating from anywhere. His organization is still in the United States."

A KNOCK sounded at the door. In response to the doctor's command a messenger entered and presented a letter. Dr. Bird read it and dropped it in a waste basket.

"Tell them that I am otherwise engaged just now," he said curtly. The messenger withdrew. "It was just a summons to another meeting of the council of scientists," he said to Carnes. "They'll have to get along without me. All they'll do anyway will be to read a lot of dispatches and wrangle about data and the relative accuracy of their observations. Herriott will lecture for hours on celestial mechanics and propound some fool theory about a hidden body, which doesn't exist, and its possible influence, which would be nil, on the inclination of the earth's axis. After wasting four hours without a single constructive idea being put forward, they will gravely conclude that the sun rose fifty-three seconds earlier at the fortieth north parallel than it did yesterday and correspondingly later at the fortieth south parallel. I know that without wasting time."

"Was it fifty-three seconds to-day, Doctor?"

"Yes. This is the twentieth of July. The sun should have risen at 4:52, sixteen minutes later than it rose on June twentieth and fifty-three seconds later than it rose yesterday. Instead it rose at 4:20, sixteen minutes *earlier* than it did on June twentieth and fifty-three seconds earlier than yesterday."

"I don't understand what is causing it, Doctor. I have tried to follow your published explanations, but they are a little too deep for me."

"AS to the real underlying cause, I am in grave doubts, Carnes, although I can make a pretty shrewd guess. As to the reason for the unnatural lengthening of the day, the explanation is simplicity itself. As you doubtless know, the earth revolves daily on its axis. At the same time, it is moving in a great ellipse about the sun, an ellipse which it takes it a year to cover. If the axis of rotation of the earth were at right angles to the plane of its orbit; in other words, if the earth's equator lay in the plane of the earth's movement about the sun, each day would be of the same length and there would be no seasons. Instead of this being the case, the axis of rotation of the earth is tipped so that the angle between the equator and the elliptic is 23½°."

"I seem to remember something of the sort from my school days."

"This angle of tilt may be assumed to be constant, for I won't bother with the precessions, nutations and other minor movements considered in accurate computations. As the earth moves around the sun, this tilt gives rise to what we call the sun's

declination. You can readily see that at one time in the year, the north pole will be at it's nearest point to the sun, speaking in terms of tilt and not in miles, while at another point on the elliptic, it will be farthest from the sun and the south pole nearest. There are two midway points when the two poles are practically equidistant."

"Then the days and nights should be of equal length."

"They are. These are the periods of the equinoxes. The point at which the sun is nearest to the south pole we call the winter solstice, and the opposite point, the summer solstice. The summer solstice is on June twenty-first. At that time the declination of the sun is 23½° north of the equatorial line. It starts to decrease until, six months later, it reaches a minus declination of 23½° and is that far south of the line. The longest day in the northern hemisphere is naturally June twenty-first."

"And the shortest day when the sun has the greatest minus declination."

"PRECISELY, at the winter solstice. Now to explain what is happening. The year went normally until June twenty-first. That day was of the correct length, about fourteen hours and fifty minutes long. The twenty-second should have been shorter. Instead, it was longer than the twenty-first. Each day, instead of getting shorter as it should at this time of year, is getting longer. We have already gained some thirty-two minutes of sunlight at this latitude. The explanation is that the angle between the equator and the elliptic is no longer 23½° as it has been from time immemorial, but it is greater. If the continuing tilt keeps up long enough, the obliquity will be 90°. When that happens, there will be perpetual midday at the north pole and perpetual night at the south pole. The whole northern hemisphere will be bathed in a continuous flood of sunlight while the southern hemisphere will be a region of cold and dark. The condition of the earth will resemble that of Mercury where the same face of the planet is continually facing the sun."

"I understand that all right, but I am still in the dark as to what is causing this increase of tilt."

"No more than I am, old dear. Herriott keeps babbling about a hidden body which is drawing the earth from its normal axial rotation, but the fool ignores the fact that a body of a size sufficient to disturb the earth would throw every motion of the solar system into a state of chaos. Nothing of the sort has happened. Ergo, no external force is causing it. I am positive that the force which is doing the work is located on the earth itself. Furthermore, unless my calculations are badly off, this force is located on or very near the surface of the earth at approximately the sixty-fifth degree of north latitude."

"How can you tell that, Doctor?"

"It would take me too long to explain, Carnes. I will, however, qualify my statement a little. Either a variable force is being used or else a constant force located where I have said. The sixty-fifth parallel is a long line. The exact location and the nature of that force, we have to find. If it be man-made, and I'll bet my bottom dollar that it is, we will also have to destroy it. If we fail, we'll see this world plunged into such a riot of war and bloodshed as has never before been known. It will be literally a fight of mankind for a place in the sun. Due to its favorable location in the new position of the earth, it is more than probable that Russia would emerge as the dominant power."

"Undertaking to destroy a thing that you don't know the location of and of whose existence you aren't even sure is a pretty big contract."

"WE'VE tackled bigger ones, old dear. We have the President behind us. I haven't made much headway selling my idea to that gang of old fossils who call themselves the council of scientists, but I did to his nibs. Just before that attempt at assassination, I had a chin-chin with him. The fastest battle cruiser in the Navy, the *Denver*, is to be placed at my service. It will carry a big amphibian plane, so be equipped to assemble and launch it. Bolton will relieve you from the Presidential guard to-day. We sail in the morning."

"Where for, Doctor?"

"I feel sure that the force is caused and controlled by men and I know of but one man who has the genius and the will to do such a thing. That man is Saranoff. Because he must be concealed and work free from interruption, I fancy he is working in his own country. Does that answer your question?"

"It does. We sail for Russia."

"Carnesy, old dear, at times you have flashes of such scintillating brilliance that I have hopes for the future of the secret service. In time they may even show human intelligence. Toddle along now and pay your fond farewells to the bright lights of Washington. Meet me at the Pennsy station at six. We'll sail from New York in the morning."

WITH the famous scientist and his assistant as passengers, the *Denver* steamed at her best speed across the Atlantic. As soon as New York harbor was cleared, Dr. Bird charted the course. Captain Evans raised his eyebrows when he saw the course laid out, but his orders had been positive. Had Dr. Bird ordered him to steam at full speed against the shore, he would have obeyed without question.

The *Denver* avoided the usual lanes of traffic and bore to the north of the summer lane. Not a vessel was sighted in the eight days which elapsed before the Faroe Islands came in sight on the starboard bow. The *Denver* bore still more to the north and skirted around North Cape five days later. At Cape Kanin she headed south into the White Sea. Surprisingly little ice was encountered. When Captain Evans mentioned this, Dr. Bird pointed out to him that it was August and that the days were still lengthening. Once in the White Sea, the *Denver* was made ready for instant action. A huge amphibian plane was hoisted in sections from the hold and mechanics started to assemble it. Dr. Bird spent most of his time working on some instruments he had assembled in the radio room.

"This is an ultra-short wave detector," he explained to Carnes. "It will receive vibrations to the lowest limit of waves that we have ever been able to measure. The X-ray is high on the scale and even the cosmic ray is far above its lower limit of detection. We are hunting for an electro-magnet, the largest and strangest electro-magnet that has ever been constructed. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that we are seeking for a generator of magnetic force. It does not generate the ordinary magnetism which attracts iron and steel, nor the special type of magnetism which we call gravity, but something between the two. It attracts the sun enough to disturb the tilt of the earth's axis, but not enough to pull the earth out of its orbit. Such a device should give out a wave that can be detected, if we get a receiver delicate enough and operating on the right wave length."

HE spent hours improving and refining the apparatus, but in the end he confessed himself beaten.

"It's no use, Carnes," he said the day after Cape Kanin faded from view to the north. "Either the apparatus we are seeking gives out no

wave that we can detect or my apparatus is faulty. Luckily we have other things to guide us."

"What are they, Doctor?"

"The facts that Saranoff must have easy transportation and a source of power. The first precludes him from locating his station far from the seacoast and the second indicates that it will be near a river or other source of power. The only Russian points on the sixty-fifth parallel that are open to water transport are the Gulf of Anadyr, north of Kamchatka, and the vicinity of Archangel. I passed up Kamchatka because it would mean too long a haul through unfriendly waters from Leningrad and because there is not much water power. Archangel is easy of access at this time of the year and it has the Dwina river for power. That will be our first line of search."

"We will explore by plane, of course?"

"Certainly. We wouldn't get far on foot, especially as neither of us speaks Russian. We'll head south for another day and then— What's that?"

HE paused and listened. From the distance came a dull drone of sound which brought him to his feet with a start. He raced out onto deck with Carnes at his heels. Far overhead in the blue, a tiny speck of black hovered.

"We're on the right trail, Carnes," he said grimly. The plane passed over them. In huge circles it sank toward the ground. Dr. Bird turned to Captain Evans. Orders flew from the bridge and a detail of marines rapidly stripped the covers from the two forward anti-aircraft rifles.

"I dislike to fire on that craft before it makes a hostile demonstration, Dr. Bird," demurred Captain Evans. "We are at peace with Russia. My action in firing might precipitate a war, or in any event, serious diplomatic misunderstandings."

"Allow me to correct you, Captain Evans, we are at war with Russia. The whole world is at war with the man who has pulled the earth out of her course. In any event, your orders are positive and the responsibility is mine. Wait until that plane gets within easy range and then shoot it down. Do not fail to get it; it must not get back to shore with word of our approach."

Captain Evans bowed gravely. Shells came up from the magazines and were piled by the guns. From the fire control stations came a monotonous calling of firing data. The guns slowly changed direction as the plane descended. Nearer and nearer it came, intent on positive identification of the war vessel below it. It passed over the *Denver* less than five thousand feet up. As it passed it swung off to one side and began to climb sharply. Dr. Bird glanced at the fighting top of the cruiser and swore softly. From the top the stars and stripes had been broken to the breeze.

"Fire at once!" he cried, "and then court-martial the fool who broke out that flag!"

THE two three-inch rifles barked their message of death into the sky. For agonizing seconds nothing happened. The guns roared again. Below and behind the fleeing plane, two puffs of white smoke appeared in the sky. The staccato calls of the observers came from the control station and the guns roared again and again. Now above and now below the Russian plane appeared the white puffs that told of bursting shells, but the plane droned on, unharmed.

"It's away safely," groaned the doctor. "Now the fat *is* in the fire. Saranoff will know in an hour that we are coming. If we had a pursuit plane ready to take off, we might catch him, but we haven't. Oh, well, there's no use in crying over spilt milk. How soon will that amphibian be ready to take off?"

"In twenty minutes, Doctor," replied the Engineering Officer. "As soon as we finish filling the tanks and test the motor, she'll be ready to ramble."

"Hurry all you can. Hang a half dozen hundred-pound bombs and a few twenty-fives on the racks. Lower her over the side as soon as she's ready. Where's Lieutenant McCready?"

"Below, getting into his flying togs, Doctor."

"Good enough. Come on, Carnes, we'll go below and put on our fur-lined panties, too. We'll probably need them."

IN half an hour the amphibian rose from the water. Lieutenant McCready was at the controls, with Carnes and the doctor at the bomb racks. The plane rose in huge spirals until the altimeter read four thousand feet. The pilot straightened it out toward the south. The plane was alone in the sky. For two hours it flew south and then veered to the east, following the line of the Gulf of Archangel. The town came in sight at last.

"Better drop down a couple of thousand, Lieutenant," said Dr. Bird into the speaking tube. "We can't see much from this altitude."

The plane swung around in a wide circle, gradually losing altitude. Carnes and the doctor hung over the side watching the ground below them. As they watched a puff of smoke came from a low building a mile from the edge of the town. Dr. Bird grabbed the speaking tube.

"Bank, McCready!" he barked, "They're firing at us."

The plane lurched sharply to one side. From a point a few yards below them and almost directly along their former line of flight, a burst of flame appeared in the air. The plane lurched and reeled as the blast of the explosion reached it. From other points on the ground came other puffs.

"Get out of here," shouted Dr. Bird. "There must be a dozen guns firing at us. One of them will have the range directly."

From all around them came flashes and the roar of explosions. The plane lurched and yawed in a sickening fashion. Lieutenant McCready fought heroically with the controls, trying to prevent the sideslips which were costing him altitude. Gradually the plane came under control and started to climb. The shells burst nearer as the plane took a straighter course and strove to fly out of the danger zone. Dr. Bird looked at the air-speed meter.

"A hundred and eighty," he shouted to Carnes. "We'll be safely out of range in a minute."

THE bursts were mostly behind them now. Suddenly a blast of air struck them with terrific force. Half a dozen holes appeared in the fabric of the wings. A bit of high explosive shell plowed a way through the after compartment and wrecked the duplicate instrument board. In another moment they were out of range. Lieutenant McCready turned the nose of his plane toward the north.

"We came out of that well," cried Carnes. Dr. Bird dropped the speaking tube which he had held pressed to his ear and smiled grimly at the detective.

"I wish we had," he replied. "Our main gas tank is punctured."

An expression of alarm crossed the detective's face.

"Is it injured badly?" he asked.

"I don't know yet. McCready says that the gauge is dropping pretty rapidly. I'm going to go out and see what I can do."

"Can't I go, Doctor? I'm a good deal lighter than you are."

"You're not as strong or as agile, Carnes, and you haven't the mechan-

ical ability to make the repair. Hand me that line."

He fastened one end of a coil of manila rope which Carnes handed him to his waist, while the detective fastened the other end to one of the safety belt hooks. With a word of farewell, he climbed out of the cockpit and onto a wing. In the pocket of his flying suit he carried a tool kit and repair material. Carnes shuddered as the doctor's figure disappeared under the plane. He snubbed the rope about a seat bracket and held it taut. For ten minutes the strain continued. It slackened at last, and the figure of the doctor reappeared on the wing. Slowly he climbed into the cockpit.

"I've made a temporary repair, Lieutenant," he called into the speaking tube, "and the leakage has stopped. How much gas have we left?"

"Enough for about an hour of flying, including the emergency tank."

"Thunder! No chance to get back to the *Denver*. Better head inland and follow the course of the Dwina. If we can locate the place we are looking for we may be able to drop a few eggs on it before we are washed out. In any event, it will be better to come down on land than on water."

McCREADY headed the plane south and followed the winding ribbon below him which marked the channel of the Dwina. He kept his altitude well over eight thousand feet. For a few minutes the plane roared along. Without warning the motor sputtered once or twice and died.

"Gas finished?" asked Dr. Bird into the speaking tube.

"No, there is plenty of gas for another forty-five minutes. It acted like a short in the wiring. Maybe another fragment got us that we didn't know about. I can glide to a safe landing, Doctor. Which direction shall I go?"

"It doesn't matter," replied Dr. Bird as he looked over the side. "Wait a minute, it does matter. See that long low building down there with the projection like a tower on top? I'll bet a month's pay that that is the very place we're looking for. Glide over it and let's have a look at it. If I am convinced of it, I'll drop a few eggs on it."

"Right!"

McCready glided on a long slope toward the suspected building. Dr. Bird kept his eye glued to the bomb sight.

"It's suspicious enough for me to act," he cried. "Drop one!"

Carnes pulled a lever and a hundred-pound high explosive bomb detached itself from the plane and fell toward the ground.

"Another!" cried the doctor.

A second messenger of death followed the first.

"Bank around and back over while we give them the rest."

"Right!"

The plane swung around in a wide circle.

"Volley!" cried the doctor. Carnes pulled the master lever and the rest of the bombs fell earthward.

"Now glide to the east, McCready, until you are forced down."

McCREADY banked the plane and started on a long glide toward the east. Carnes and the doctor watched the falling bombs. The doctor's aim had been perfect. The first bomb released struck the building squarely while the other landed only a few feet away. Instead of the puffs of smoke which they had expected, the bombs had no effect. The volley which Carnes had discharged fell full on the building as harmlessly as had the two pilot shots.

"Were those bombs armed, Lieutenant?" demanded the doctor.

"Yes, sir. I inspected them myself before we took off and they were fused and armed. They had always

fused and should have gone off, no matter in what position they landed."

"Well, they didn't. That building is our goal all right. Saranoff would naturally expect an air raid and he has perfected some device which renders a bomb impotent before it lands. How far from the building will you land?"

"A couple of miles, Doctor."

"Get as far as you can. If you can make that line of thicket ahead, we'll take to our heels and hope to hide in it."

"I don't think we'll have much luck, Doctor," said Carnes.

"Why not?"

"Look behind."

Dr. Bird looked back toward the building they had tried to bomb. Across the country, a truck loaded with armed men followed the course of the plane. The plane was gaining slightly on the truck but it was evident that the plane's occupants would have little chance of escaping on foot. Dr. Bird gave a grim laugh.

"We're cornered all right," he said. "If we did elude the men in that truck, we would have a plane after us in no time. You might as well turn back, McCready, and land fairly near the building. We are sure to be captured and our best chance is to have the plane near us. They'll probably patch it up and if we get a chance to escape later, it may be a lifesaver. At any rate, we've lost for the present."

McCREADY turned the plane again to the west. The truck halted at their new maneuver. As the plane passed over, it turned and again followed them. The ground was approaching rapidly. With a final dip, McCready leveled off and made a landing. The machine rolled to a stop about a mile from the building. The truck was less than three hundred yards away. It came up rapidly and disgorged a dozen men armed with rifles who hurried forward. In the lead was a tall, slight figure who carried no gun. Dr. Bird stepped forward to meet them.

"Do you understand English?" he asked.

An incomprehensible jargon of Russian answered him. The men raised their rifles threateningly. Dr. Bird turned back to his companions.

"Resistance is hopeless," he said. "Surrender gracefully and we'll see what comes of it."

He faced the Russians and held one hand high above his head. The Russian leader stepped forward and confiscated the doctor's pistol. He repeated the process with Carnes and McCready, frisking them thoroughly for concealed weapons. At his command, six of the Russians stepped forward. The Americans took their place in the midst of the guard and were marched to the truck. The balance of the Russians moved over to the American's plane. The truck rolled forward and approached the low building. The projection which Dr. Bird had noticed from the air proved to be a metal tube projection from the roof, fully twenty feet in diameter and fifty feet long.

"A projection tube of some sort," said the doctor, pointing. An excited command came from the Russian in command. A rifle was leveled threateningly at the doctor. He took the hint and maintained silence while they climbed down from the truck and approached the door of the building.

It swung open as they approached. As they entered a strong garlic-like smell was evident. The hum of heavy machinery smote their ears.

THEY were led down a corridor to a flight of steps. On the floor below they went along another corridor to a heavy iron-studded door. The guide unlocked it with a huge key and swung it open. With a shrug of his shoulders, Dr. Bird led the way into the cell. The door closed

behind them and they were left alone. Dr. Bird turned to his companions.

"Be careful what you say," he whispered. "I am not at all convinced that there is no one here who knows English and we are probably spied upon. There is almost sure to be a dictaphone somewhere in this room. We don't want to give them any more information than we have to."

Carnes and McCready nodded. Dr. Bird spoke aloud of inconsequential matters while they explored the cell. It was a room some twenty feet square, fitted with three bunks on one side, built into the wall like the berths on shipboard. The room was lighted by a single electric light overhead. A door opened into a lavatory equipped with running water.

"We're comfortable here, at any rate," said the doctor cheerfully. "They evidently don't mean to make us suffer. I'd like to know why they took the trouble to capture us, anyway. It would seem to be more in line with their usual policy to have shot us on sight. It must be that they want some sort of information from us."

Neither of his companions had a better reason to offer and conversation languished. For an hour they sat almost without speech. A sound at the door brought them to their feet. It opened and a Russian girl pushed in a cart laden with food. She made no reply to the remarks which Dr. Bird addressed to her but quickly and silently put their food on the table. When she had completed her task, she left the room without having spoken a word.

"Beautiful, but dumb," Dr. Bird remarked. "Let's eat."

"Do you suppose that it's safe to eat this food, Doctor?" asked Carnes in a whisper.

"I don't know, and I don't care. If we've got to go out, we might as well be poisoned as shot. If we refuse food, they can poison us through our water. We couldn't refuse that for any length of time. I'm hungry and I'm going to make a good meal. What's this stuff, *bortsch*?"

THEY soon received proof that they were under observation. Hardly had they pushed back their chairs at the completion of the meal than the door opened and the Russian girl who had brought their food removed the empty dishes. Silence settled down over the cell. For another hour they waited before the door opened again. A tall bearded Russian entered with a younger man at his heels. The bearded man dropped into a chair while his companion sat at the table and opened a notebook.

"Stand up!" barked the Russian sternly.

Carnes and McCready rose to their feet but Dr. Bird remained stretched out on a bed.

"What for?" he demanded languidly.

The Russian bristled with rage.

"When I speak to you, you shall obey," he said in curiously clipped English, "else it will be the worse for you. Would you rather be questioned while in the *strelska* than while standing?"

"Not by a long shot," replied Dr. Bird promptly as he rose to his feet. "Fire away, old fellow. I'll talk."

"What are your names?"

"I am Addison Sims of Seattle," replied Dr. Bird gravely, "and my friends are Mr. Earle Liedermann and Mr. Bernarr Macfadden. You may have read of us in the American magazines."

"Their names," said the Russian to his clerk, "are Dr. Bird, of the Bureau of Standards; Operative Carnes, of the United States Secret Service; and Lieutenant McCready, of the United States Navy. Dr. Bird, you will save yourself trouble if you will answer my future questions truthfully."

"Then ask questions to which I am not sure that you know the answer," replied the doctor dryly.

"What vessel brought you here?"

"The *Denver*."

"What is her armament?"

"Consult the Navy list. You will doubtless find a copy in your files. It may be purchased from the Superintendent of Public Documents at Washington."

"WHAT is your errand here?"

"To consult with Ivan Saranoff and learn his future plans. If he means merely to bestow on the northern hemisphere additional sunshine and warmth, it is possible that the United States will not oppose him. We would benefit equally with Russia, you know. Possibly the northern countries could form some sort of an alliance against the southern hemisphere which is already threatening war."

"You chose a peculiar way of showing your peaceable intentions. You shot down our plane without warning and you dropped bombs on us at first sight."

"But they didn't explode."

"No, thanks to our ray operators. Dr. Bird, I have no time to waste. Either you will answer my questions fully and truthfully or I will resort to torture."

"You don't dare. You were merely bluffing when you mentioned the *strelska*. If you tortured us, you would have to answer to Ivan Saranoff on his return."

"How did you know that he is—" The Russian paused and bit his lip. "Shall I tell him that you refuse to talk?"

"When he returns, you may tell him that I will be glad to talk frankly with him. I came to Russia for that purpose, but I will not talk with one of his underlings. In the meanwhile, we are having lovely weather for this time of year, aren't we?"

With a muttered curse the Russian rose and left the room. Carnes turned to Dr. Bird.

"How did you know that Saranoff was away?" he demanded.

"I didn't," replied Dr. Bird with a chuckle, "it was merely a shrewd guess. We have twisted his tail so often that I figured he could not resist the temptation to come here and gloat a few gloats over us if he were here. I know his ruthless methods in dealing with his subordinates and I knew that they would never dare to resort to torture in his absence. No, old dear, we are safe until he returns. I hope he stays away a long time."

FOUR days passed monotonously. Three times a day the Russian girl appeared with ample meals. Despite their attempts to engage her in conversation, not a word would she reply or give any indication that she either heard or understood their remarks. The bearded Russian appeared daily and tried to question them, but Dr. Bird laughed at his threats and reaffirmed his intention of talking to no one but Saranoff.

"Your chance will soon come," replied the Russian with an evil leer on the fourth day. "He will be here the day after to-morrow. He will be able to make you talk."

"If he's telling the truth, the jig's about up," said Dr. Bird when the Russian had left. "I don't fancy that Saranoff will show us much mercy when he finds out what we've attempted to do."

"How would it be to overpower our waitress and make a break?" asked McCready in a guarded whisper.

"No good at all," replied the doctor decisively. "We wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance. Our best bet is to talk turkey to Saranoff. He may spare us if I can make him believe that I am willing to work for him. What a man he is! If we could turn his genius into the right channels, he would be a blessing to the world."

HE paused as the door swung open and the Russian girl appeared with their food. She placed the cart against the wall and suddenly turned and faced them.

"Dr. Bird," she said in excellent English, "I am Feodrovna Androvitch."

"I'm glad to know you," said Dr. Bird with a bow.

"Do you recognize my name?"

"I'm very sorry, my dear, but it simply doesn't register."

"Do you remember Stefan Androvitch?"

A sudden light came into Dr. Bird's face.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "I do. He used to work for me in the Bureau some time ago. I had to let him go under peculiar circumstances. Is he related to you?"

"He was my twin brother. The peculiar circumstances you refer to were that you caught him stealing platinum. Instead of turning him over to the police, you asked him why he stole. He told you his wife was dying for lack of things that money would buy and he stole for her. You allowed him to quit his position honorably and you gave him money for his immediate needs. For that act of mercy, I am here to reward you."

"Bread cast upon the waters," murmured Carnes. The Russian girl turned on him like a wildcat.

"Unless you wish to deprive yourself and your companions of my help, you will not quote the Bible, that sop thrown by the church to their slaves, to me," she said venomously. "I am a woman of the proletariat!"

"Respect the lady's anti-religious prejudices, Carnesy, old dear," said the doctor with a smile. "How do you propose to aid us, Miss Androvitch?"

"I will give you exactly what you gave my brother, your freedom and money for your immediate needs."

"Thanks. But, er—haven't you considered what your position here will be if you aid us to escape? Saranoff doesn't deal kindly with traitors, I fancy."

The girl spat on the floor.

"That swine!" she hissed, "I would like to kill him. I would have done so long ago had not the hope of the people rested on his genius. When the people finally triumph, I will feed his heart to my cat."

"Nice, gentle, loving disposition," murmured the doctor. "All right, my dear, we're ready for anything. What's the first move?"

THE girl whisked the cover from the food cart and displayed three pistols and belts of ammunition.

"Put these on," she said, "and take this food with you. I will take you to a hiding place outside the walls where you may safely stay for a few days. I will bring you fresh supplies of food. As quickly as possible I will arrange for you to escape from Russia. When you have left Russia safely, my debt is paid and you are again my enemies."

"But, listen here," said Dr. Bird persuasively, "why don't you come with us? You know the object of our coming here. We aim to destroy this plant and let the earth take its normal tilt. You hate Saranoff, although I don't know why. If you'll help us to destroy him, we'll guarantee you a welcome in the United States and you can join your brother. I'll take him back into my laboratory."

"My brother is dead," she said bitterly. "After he left you, he fell into more evil times. His wife died and he swore revenge upon the society which had murdered her. An opportunity came to him to join Saranoff, and he did so. Saranoff hated him and distrusted him, although he was the soul of loyalty. As a reward for his genius and aid to Saranoff in constructing the black lamp, Saranoff

abandoned him to you. It was your men who killed him when you blew into nothingness the helicopter he was piloting in your state of Maryland, near Washington."

"All the more reason why you should revenge yourself upon Saranoff," replied the doctor. "We will give you a chance to do so and aid you. We also give you an opportunity to be received in a free country with honor."

An expression of rage distorted the girl's features.

"I am a woman of the proletariat!" she cried. "I hate Ivan Saranoff for what he has done, but I am loyal to him. He alone will force the bourgeoisie to their knees and establish the rule of the people. I hate your country and your government; yes, and I hate you. I aid you because I must pay my just debts. Come, the way is clear for your escape. Don't ask how I cleared it."

"Come on," said Dr. Bird with a shrug of his shoulders. "There is no arguing with convictions. She must act according to her lights, even as we must act according to ours. Grab your guns and let's go."

THE three buckled on the weapons and belts of ammunition and followed the girl from the cell. Once outside she touched her lips for silence. A door barred their way but she opened it with a key which she withdrew from her dress. Outside the door, a guard slumbered noisily. At a motion from the girl, Carnes rolled him over on his face to quiet his snoring. He moved and stirred, but did not wake.

A few feet from the door the girl paused and faced the wall. She manipulated a hidden lever and a panel swung open in the wall. She led the way silently into the dark. As the panel closed behind her, a beam of light from an electric torch stabbed the darkness. Down a sloping tunnel they followed her for half a mile. The tunnel turned at right angles and led upward. At length they paused before another door. The girl opened it and they stepped out into the night. As they did so, a dull booming struck their ears. The girl paused.

"The ship!" she cried, "Your ship! It is attacking Fort Novadwinskaja. The factory will be awake in a moment! Run for your lives!"

Even as she spoke a pair of twinkling lights appeared far down the tunnel through which they had come. She turned as if to return down the tunnel. Dr. Bird caught her about the waist and clapped his hand over her mouth.

"Quick, Carnes, your belt," he cried. "Tie her up. She meant to go down that tunnel and give her life to delay them while we escaped. We'll save her in spite of herself."

Carnes and McCready quickly bound the struggling girl with their belts. They laid her on the ground beside the door and watched the oncoming lights.

"You two hold them back for the present," said the doctor. "I'm going to take Feodrovna away a bit and argue gently with her. If I can make her see the light, we may accomplish our mission yet. If I can't, I'll come back and help you."

HE picked up the girl in his arms and disappeared into the darkness. Pistol in hand, the two men watched the oncoming lights. The men behind the lights could not be seen, but from the sound of their footsteps it was evident that there were quite a few of them.

"Had we better let them emerge from the door and then get them?" whispered Carnes.

"No. These heavy guns will drive a bullet through three men at short range. Level your gun down the tunnel and fire when I give the word. Remember, every one is apt to shoot high in the dark."

The lights approached slowly. When they were twenty-five yards away, Lieutenant McCready spoke. The quiet was shattered by the roar of two Luger pistols. Again and again the guns barked. A volley of fire came from the tunnel, but Carnes and the lieutenant were standing well away from the opening and they escaped unharmed. Their deadly fire poured into the shambles until they were rewarded by the sound of retreating feet.

"So ends round one," said Carnes with a laugh. "I think we win on points."

"They won't try a direct attack again," replied the lieutenant. "Look out for a flank attack or from some new weapon. I don't like the way those bombs failed to explode the other day."

Dr. Bird appeared from the darkness.

"McCready," he said in a voice vibrant with excitement, "we're in luck. We have come out less than a hundred yards from the point where our plane came down. It is still there. If the *Denver* has approached within shooting range, we will have enough gas to make it. Try to get your motor going."

"If it isn't completely washed out I'll have it going in a few minutes, Doctor," cried the pilot. "I'm going down the tunnel and get those flashlights those birds dropped when they pulled out. Where's the girl?"

"She's back by the plane," said the doctor with a chuckle. "She is a spitfire, all right. I took her gag off and she tried to bite me. I couldn't get a word of anything but abuse out of her. Go ahead and get the lights and I'll show you the plane."

IN a few minutes they stood before the ship. It was apparently uninjured, but the spark was dead. Carnes went back to the tunnel mouth to guard against surprise while Dr. Bird and McCready labored over the motor. Despite the best of both of them, no spark could be coaxed from the coil. As a last resort, Dr. Bird short-circuited the cells with a screwdriver blade. No answering spark came from the terminals.

"Dead as a mackerel," he remarked. "I guess that ends that hope. Let's get the machine guns out of her. We'll have another attack soon and they'll be more effective than our pistols."

It was the work of a few minutes to dismount the two Brownings from the plane. Carrying the two guns, Dr. Bird joined Carnes while McCready staggered along laden down with belts of ammunition.

"Do you remember that ricky knoll we passed just before we landed?" asked the lieutenant. "If we can get this stuff there before we are attacked, we'll have a much better chance than we will in the open."

"Good idea, Lieutenant. Carnes, connect yourself to one of these guns. I'll fasten the other on my back and carry Feodrovna. We can't leave her here to Saranoff's tender mercies."

Through the night the little cavalcade made its way. The thunder of guns from Fort Novadwinskaja kept up and the sky to the north was lighted by their flashes. McCready's bump of direction proved to be a good one for the sought-for retreat was soon located. As they deposited their burdens and looked back, the lights of two trucks could be seen approaching across the plain from the factory. Hurriedly they mounted the machine guns. Dr. Bird straightened up and listened carefully.

"The guns are sounding less frequently," he said. "Possibly the *Denver* has had enough and is pulling out."

"If I know Captain Evans as well as I think I do, the *Denver* is not retreating," replied McCready, grimly.

"I hope she's hammering the fort out of existence," said the doctor. "However, our main interest just now is on the land front. Gunners to the fore. Carnes, you aren't so good at this, better let McCready and me handle them."

THE trucks approached slowly. Presently the American plane loomed up in the glare of their headlights. A powerful searchlight mounted on the leading truck swept the country. Discovery was a matter of moments. Lieutenant McCready trained his gun carefully and pressed the trigger. A rattle of fire came from the Browning. A crash was heard from the truck and the searchlight winked out.

"Bull's-eye!" cried Carnes exultantly.

"Down, you fool!" cried the doctor as he swept the detective from his feet and threw him down behind a rock. His action was none too soon. A burst of machine gun fire came from the trucks and a hail of bullets splattered on the rocks a few yards from them. McCready crawled back to his gun.

"Wait a minute, Lieutenant," counseled the doctor. "A burst of fire from here will give them our location and probably do them little damage. Wait until they try to rush us."

They did not have long to wait. A guttural shout came from a point a few yards away and the sound of running feet came to their ears. The rush was directed toward a point a few yards to the left of where they crouched. Dr. Bird swung his gun around. As the rush passed them, he released his trigger. A volley of screams and oaths from the plain answered the crackle of the Browning. McCready's gun joined in with a staccato burst of fire. The attack could not live before that rain of death. A few running feet were heard from the darkness and a few groans. Presently the roar of a motor came from the direction of the parked trucks. It retreated into the distance and all was quiet.

"Round two goes to us on a knockdown," said Carnes jubilantly. "What will they do next, Doctor?"

"Probably nothing until daylight, now that they know we have machine guns. I wish that we could make that thicket, but it's too far to try. It'll be daylight in an hour or so."

The night was normally short in Archangel at that season of the year and the unnatural lengthening of the day which Saranoff had accomplished made it shorter still. In an hour red streamers in the east announced the approach of daylight. Hardly had they appeared than a dull drone of truck motors came from the direction of the factory.

"Round three is about to commence," announced Carnes. "I wish that I could do something."

"You can as soon as our ammunition runs out, which won't be long," replied McCready. "It will be a matter of pistols at close quarters."

THE trucks approached to within a half mile and stopped. The distance was too great to warrant wasting any of their scanty store of ammunition at such long range. In the dim light they would see the Russians working at the trucks. Presenly a flash came from the plain. A whining sound filled the air. With a crash a three-inch shell broke behind them.

"No fun," remarked the doctor. "We'll have to get better cover than this."

A second shell whined through the air and burst over their heads. A third burst a few yards in front of them.

"They have us bracketed now," said McCready. "We'd better slide back a piece before they start rapid fire."

Dragging their prisoner with

them, the three men made their way to the reverse side of the knoll. A short search revealed an overhanging ledge under which they crouched in comparative safety from anything but a direct hit above them.

"We're all right here except for the fact that they may rush us under cover of the fire," said the doctor, "One man will have to keep watch all the time and it will be a dangerous detail. I'll take the first hitch."

"You will not!" exclaimed Carnes emphatically. "I have done nothing so far and I am the least important member of the party. I'll do the watching."

"Let's draw straws," suggested McCready. "I'm willing to do that, but if it's a matter of volunteering, I refuse to yield to the civilian branches of the government. The Navy has traditions to uphold, you know."

"McCready's right," replied the doctor. "Get straws, Lieutenant, and we'll draw."

McCready picked up three bits of grass and held them out.

"The shortest goes on watch," he said. Carnes and the doctor drew, McCready exhibited the remaining bit of grass. It was the shortest of the three. He waited until the next shell burst above them and then stepped out from the shelter.

"I'll relieve you in fifteen minutes," said Carnes as he left.

"Right."

WHEN the lieutenant had left, Dr. Bird removed the gag from Feodrovna's mouth and tried to argue with her, but the Russian girl only glared her hatred and refused to talk other than to abuse him. With a sigh, the doctor gave over his efforts and talked to Carnes. The time passed slowly with a constant rain of shells on the knoll.

"It's time for my relief," said Carnes at length. As he spoke the hail of shells on the knoll ceased.

"What the dickens?" cried the doctor.

He and Carnes jumped from their shelter and ran over the knoll. On the plain a few hundred yards from them, a straggling line of Russians were advancing with fixed bayonets. McCready was nowhere in sight.

"Where the devil is McCready?" cried the doctor. "He must have been killed. Hello, one of the guns is gone, too. There's only a belt and a half of ammunition left. I'll try to break that attack up."

He advanced to the gun and trained it carefully. When he pressed the trigger a dull click came from the gun.

"Misfire!" he cried. He drew back the bolt and inserted a fresh cartridge. Again the gun clicked harmlessly. Dr. Bird ejected the shell and examined it. A deep indentation appeared on the primer. Hurriedly he tried a half dozen more cartridges but they refused to explode. He turned a keen gaze toward the trucks. On the ground was set a tube-like projector pointing toward them. Dr. Bird swore softly and jerked his pistol from its holster. The hammer clicked futilely on a cartridge.

"Stymied!" he exclaimed. "They have that portable ray mechanism with them, which disabled our bombs. It's hand to hand, Carnesy, old dear. I wonder where McCready is."

THE Russians approached slowly, keeping their lines straight. They were within two hundred yards of the knoll. Suddenly from a point a hundred yards to the left of the end of the land came a rattle of fire. The attacking line dropped in a pile of grotesque heaps.

"It's McCready!" shouted Carnes. A little ravine ran from the knoll toward the trucks. Sitting in the ravine was the lieutenant, playing a Browning machine gun on the line of attackers. When there were no

more of them on their feet, he turned his gun on the trucks. Panic seized the Russians and they made a rush for their truck. Their leader leaped among them, yelling furiously. They paused and turned to the projector tube. Slowly they swung it around. The lieutenant's gun ceased firing.

As the Russians rushed the now silent gun, Dr. Bird stepped to the gun on the knoll. He trained it and pressed the trigger. A rattle of fire came from it and two of the rushing figures fell. The attack paused for an instant. McCready had risen to his feet and was running up the ravine with his gun under his arm.

"Good head!" cried Dr. Bird, "Clever work! Watch the fun now."

He ceased firing his gun. The Russians wavered and then rushed the point from which McCready had fired. The lieutenant allowed them to get to within a short distance and then crumpled the attack with another burst of fire from the flank. With cries of alarm, the Russians turned and fled toward their trucks. McCready ran along the ravine until he was within fifty yards of the standing machines. As the Russians approached, one of them stepped to the truck crank. McCready's pistol spoke and he dropped. A second shared his fate. With cries of despair, the Russians climbed into the remaining truck whose motor was running. Rapidly it drove away across the plain. McCready rose from the ravine and ran toward the standing truck. He started the motor and headed for the knoll.

"He's got a truck," cried Carnes. "We can get away in it."

"Where to?" demanded Dr. Bird. "Archangel is between us and the *Denver*."

The truck came up.

"Come on, Doctor," cried McCready. "Hurry up. We'll take the battery out of this truck and get our plane going."

"Oh, clever!" cried Dr. Bird admiringly. "Load that gun while I get Feodrovna, Carnesy. We'll get away safely yet."

THE truck rolled up to the plane and stopped. While Carnes transferred the prisoner and the guns to the plane, the lieutenant and Dr. Bird ripped up the floor boards of the truck and exposed the battery. It was a matter of moments to detach it and carry it to the plane. It would not fit in place but they anchored it in place with wire.

"You'd better hurry," cried Carnes. "Here come a couple more trucks over the plain."

"That'll do, Doctor," said McCready. "Get on the prop and we'll see if the old puddle jumper will take off."

Dr. Bird ran to the propeller.

"Ready!" he cried.

"Contact!" snapped McCready.

The plane motor roared into life. The ship moved slowly forward as Dr. Bird climbed on board. Toward the oncoming trucks they rushed across the plain. A crash seemed imminent. In the nick of time McCready pulled back on his joystick and the plane rose gracefully into the air, clearing the leading truck by inches. The truck halted and hastily mounted a machine gun.

"Too late!" laughed the lieutenant. "Now it's our turn for some fun."

He tapped the key of his radio transmitter. In a few seconds he received an answer.

"They have reduced Fort Novadwinskaja," he reported to the rear cockpit, "but they don't know what to fire at next. Their largest guns will reach the factory easily. Shall I start some fireworks?"

"You may fire when ready, Gridly," chuckled Dr. Bird.

Again the lieutenant depressed his key. From their altitude of four thousand feet, they could see the *Denver*. From its forward turret

came a puff of smoke. There were a few moments of pause and then a cloud of black rose from the plain below them, half a mile from the factory. McCready reported the position of the burst to the ship. A second shell burst beyond the factory and the third just in front of it.

"It's a clear bracket," said McCready. "Now watch the gun. I'll give them a salvo."

FROM the side of the *Denver* came a cloud of black smoke as all of her turret guns fired in unison. The aim was perfect. For a few moments all was quiet and then the factory disappeared in a smother of bursting high explosive shells.

Hardly had the shells landed than a terrific sheet of lightning ripped across the sky. The thunderclap which seemed to come simultaneously, rocked the plane like a feather. Sheet after sheet of lightning illuminated the sky while the roar of thunder was continuous. Rain fell in solid sheets. Even as they watched, it began to turn into snow. The air grew bitterly cold.

"The solar magnet is wrecked," shouted the doctor, "and these storms are the efforts of nature to return to normal."

"If they get any worse, we're doomed."

"But in a good cause."

Through the storm the plane raced. Suddenly the motor died with sickening suddenness.

"Our haywire battery connections are gone," shouted McCready. "Say your prayers."

The wind tossed the plane about like a feather. Rapidly it lost altitude. A building loomed up before them. As a crash seemed imminent, a gust of wind caught the plane and tossed it up into the air again. For several minutes the ground could not be seen through the rain. Suddenly the plane hit an airpocket and dropped like a stone. With a splash it fell into the sea. A rift came for a moment in the curtain of rain.

"Look!" cried Carnes.

A hundred yards away, the *Denver* rode at anchor.

"I'm only sorry about one thing," said Carnes ten minutes later as they changed to dry clothes aboard the battle cruiser, "and that is that Saranoff wasn't in the factory when that salvo fell on it."

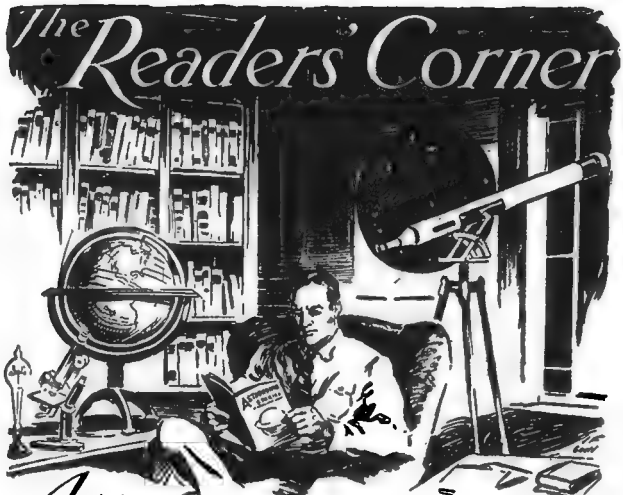
"I'm glad he was away," replied Dr. Bird. "With him absent, we succeeded in destroying it. If he had been there, our task would have been more difficult and perhaps impossible. I am an enemy of Saranoff's, but I don't underrate his colossal genius."

ASTOUNDING STORIES

For Science Fiction

STRANGE TALES

For Weird Fiction



A Meeting Place for Readers of Astounding Stories

Don't Shoot!

Dear Editor:

I would like to have an automatic rifle, equip it with a silencer, and walk into your office some day. For, why have we no reprints? And where's our quarterly?

Really, you have no idea how we Readers yearn for those two things. When are we going to get them? If nothing else, take a vote on them, anyway. It will serve to break the monotony of so many repeated howls that you receive.

Now, getting right down to the July edition of A. S., I want to say a few words in sudden, vicious slam at those proud personages who persist in finding mistakes in stories. I do it myself, occasionally, but I've found out that it is bad for the health; someone is liable to get fed up on being slammed to the four corners of the Earth.

Why do such people read A. S., anyhow? If they want to cut theories to pieces, they should pick on Einstein, not on our poor, gentle Authors who wouldn't hurt a fly. (?) I believe that a certain amount of satire is necessary in a Science Fiction story. Without it, the tale would be a common, everyday story of the type that ends up "and they lived scrappily ever after."

In the July issue, which I have mentioned above, I liked all the stories—and that's going some. "The Exile of Time" should rank with "Jetta of the Lowlands" and "Brigands of the Moon" as Cummings' best novels in the last few years. It was great.

I'll cut off now, because there are more fellows crowding down in front to holler about reprints, quarterlies, etc. I'll be seeing you!—Eugene Benefiel, The Pioneer, Tucson, Ariz.

Likes the Letters

Dear Editor:

I am accepting your invitation to write and tell you I liked the last issue, which was excellent.

Here is how I rate the stories: 1—"The Earthman's Burden," by Starzl; 2—"Holocaust," by Diffin; 3—"The Man from 2071," by Wright; 4—"The Exile of Time," by Cummings 5—"Manape the Mighty," by Burks.

My reason for rating Burks' story last not that it was not a good story, but because lately there have been so many imitations of Tarzan of the Apes in various magazines, and this resembles them.

I find that Cummings excels in convincing plots and ingenious time explanations. His stories have action and variety. But not much variety in plot. Starzl

writes vivid, exciting, convincing stories that always seem like actual happenings. Murray Leinster is in this same class. So is Diffin. Never a wasted word in their stories. I would like to read a novel by Starzl some time. S. P. Wright and Capt. Meek write a different type of story, but lead in that type. I always enjoy the letters.—Margaret Fitzgerald, Ponca, Nebr.

A Very Common Conclusion

Dear Editor:

In glancing over the letters from Readers, one is always surprised by the divergent ideas represented. Practically the only point upon which all agree is, they all intend to continue to spend twenty cents for Astounding Stories. I am forced to the same remarkable conclusion myself. Or is it an ordinary one?

I read one other Science Fiction magazine, but find Astounding Stories more to my liking. Possibly that is because each issue has one or more stories by old favorites of mine. Inasmuch as I read for entertainment, I do not care a great deal for technical backgrounds. Nor am I very particular as to whether any particular fact is considered scientifically possible in the light of present day facts. I trust the Author to not impose too heavily upon my credulity.

Personally, I do not care and never expect to care for quarterlies or annuals. I like a neat magazine, good paper if practical, a judicial sprinkling of illustrations and an old favorite occasionally; about bi-monthly, or what have you!—Kenneth C. Cable, 159 New York Ave., Rochester, Pa.

A Buttercup

Dear Editor:

Along with this enclosure I might say that in addition to being continuity director and publicity director, I take part in musical and dramatic programs, having a tenor voice. If you are acquainted with radio studios you probably know the many other little things that must be taken care of, and they usually fall to my lot.

I consider Astounding Stories the best magazine of this type on the market today, and would not miss an issue for anything. Although I read all Science Fiction magazines from cover to cover, I believe that A. S. has the best assortment to be found, and hope you keep up the good work.

The novelette, "The Hands of Aten," by H. G. Winter, which I have just finished, ranks, first in the July issue; in my estimation, anyway. However, it should have had a different ending, one which would have allowed the girl Taia to return to New York and thus leave room for a sequel.

I trust that this has not bored you, and once again I say, long live Astounding Stories.—C. A. Andrew, Sun Life Assurance Bldg., Spokane, Wash.

"Too Much"—But "Interesting"

Dear Editor:

I started reading your magazine with your May issue, and I must say that "Dark Moon," by Charles Diffin, was a great little story, as was "The Death Cloud," "When the Moon Turned Green," and the Dr. Bird story.

I was hoping for a sequel to "Dark Moon," and am glad to hear that we will have it with the August issue.

"Manape the Mighty," by Arthur J. Burks, was great, and so was "Holocaust." "The Man from 2071," and "The Exile of Time" were interesting, but time stories are a little too far fetched for me. We may be able to delve into the past, but when we bring a person long dead into the present, marry her, and then take her into the future on a honeymoon, it is too much. Anyway, they make interesting reading.

In your July issue I have just read "The Doom from Planet 4." It is good, but Jack Williamson could have made more out of it. I haven't read the rest of the mag, but it looks greater than ever.

I'd like to ask a favor from your Readers. Would be willing to buy from anyone copies of A. Merritt's "Moon Pool," and other works he has written, and also would like a list of Science Fiction authors who have had their works published in book form. Am also willing to get "The Purple Sapphire" and "The Gold Tooth" and "The Greatest Adventure," by John Taine.—Cam Costa, 309 Harmon St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

"How Divine!"

Dear Editor:

Will someone please hand me a glass of water or something to revive my fainting senses? After finishing "The Exile of Time," my brain is still in a whirl, and I am slightly fog-bound. I don't think there ever was a story that had such a dizzying effect on me as that. Oh boy! If I had only been blessed with the imagination of Ray Cummings! I'd never bother about the worries of this old world; why I could just go off by myself and carry my mind into the world of a million years hence and be in a world all my own, with no worries about the rent, or whether my salary will be cut, or anything at all for that matter. How divine! I know there will be enough criticism about that story, so I decided I would pick the one great advantage in it and write it in. That is the fact that it is certainly diverting. Not much chance for boredom there.

Well, I've said all I'm going to say about it. There's material there for an all day argument, if one wanted to argue all day, which I don't.

A few other stories I would like to com-

mend are "When the Moon Turned Green" and "Dark Moon." Also "The Death Cloud," which appeared in the May issue. In the June issue my choice for good stories is, first, of course, "Manape the Mighty." There's lots of room for discussion in that story, too. "The Man from 2071" and "Holocaust" were excellent, though the plot of the latter was old.

That little item in the July number about traveling to the moon reminds me of when I read Jules Verne's "From Earth to Moon." Sounds good in theory, anyway. "The Doom from Planet 4" is just another one of those world annihilation affairs. "The Hands of Aten," by H. G. Winter, is most entertaining. I like stories that deal with ancient races, and thank goodness it ended just a little bit different than the usual stories of that type. Let's have more of the same.

I noticed in this issue also that all your illustrations are being done now by Wesso. I congratulate you on your decision to retain him exclusively. His drawings of machinery, especially, are very accurate.—Betty Mulharen, 830 Colburn Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Two Years Late

Dear Editor:

Have just finished my first copy of Astounding Stories and want to say that I feel like kicking myself for having missed two years of delightful reading—and so cheap!

I owe it all to a friend of mine; who, when I asked him for a magazine, said that he had only one—Astounding Stories—one I never read. But being in a position where I couldn't get another magazine of the same type, I had to content myself with it and am I glad? I'll say!

I read several stories by Ray Cummings in other magazines and knew what to expect, and so I was doubly repaid. But—darn it—why did I have to get the July number with the end of his story in it? Anyway, let's have more of Mr. Cummings' work.—Edwin Brooks, 1454 South Harding Ave., Chicago, Ill.

"A New Fiction Character"

Dear Editor:

For once since this Twentieth Century began, a definitely new fiction character has been put forward: "Tugh," in "The Exile of Time." "Tugh" in a literary sense ranks with "Margrave" and "Ter" (Lytton), "West" (Bellamy) and "Olvir Elfkin." Honor to his inventor, Mr. Cummings!

May I not say here that Mr. Cummings has put forward a time-concept as scientifically logical as his creation-concept of 1928? Both have the simplicity and harmony to hard, cold facts that go with basic accuracy. No "Swami stuff" or "occultism" here, friend Ray! The non-Euclidean "modern" physicists with their "limited infinities" are far more "theosophical" to me.

In view of Dr. Wm. Teg's work, I should say that the "Master Machine" in the "Revolt of the Machines" is mechanically and scientifically possible. So are the Robots; even Tugh. But I think them easier to control than the stories state.

How would this do for a story? A red-headed, beautiful and intelligent young woman makes up a party for a Mars voyage, makes the trip with about normal risk, finds a city of the nearly extinct race that designed the waterways and establishes commercial intercourse. The narrator to be her chum. No love story, no "wild western" combats, but normal, intelligent Earthlings establishing intercourse with the remnant of a mightier and saner race.—Leon Partridge, Box 84, Cornish, Me.

Likes "Impossible" Stories

Dear Editor:

In the July number of Astounding Stories I notice that Mr. Davis says, in "The Readers' Corner," "How could the intrepid explorers on the Dark Moon see the light of Earth and the other planets if the light from the Dark Moon could not pass the gaseous formation to the Earth, etc.? And how could the Dark Moon receive the light that it did." And you replied, "Mr. Diffin did not explain that; perhaps he intends to do so in a sequel. Who knows?"

Now if I remember correctly (I gave my copy to a friend and so I can't check up on it), Mr. Diffin did explain it. He said that the gas was so composed that the light could go one way but not the other for some unknown reason.

In regard to Ray Cummings' story, "The Exile of Time," Mr. Cummings explains that the things that were done in the "past" by people of the "future" were recorded as mysteries, which is very fine and absolutely possible. He also gives a very good explanation of time being a vibrating band, and as the vibration becomes greater we pass along into the "future."

I like the "impossible" stories best because they are impossible. I think "The Tentacles from Below," by Anthony Gilmore, was the *best* story I ever read, with "Manape the Mighty" a close second. Though, of course, all your stories are good.—Herbert Fearing, Main Stree' Wenham, Mass.

Correspondents Wanted

Dear Editor:

I wish to take the opportunity to tell you that Astounding Stories is one of the most interesting and educational magazines published. I've just finished reading "Manape the Mighty," in the June issue, and it was a story among millions, and one of the best you have published so far. Keep up the good work!

I surely would be glad to have correspondents to discuss anything and everything with.—Charles Nelson, Box 288, Wells, Minn.

Now You'll Believe!

Dear Editor:

After finishing your Astounding Stories the other day I pitched it over to another traveler on the train saying, "Some good Science Fiction stories in here, but lots of rubbish."

Got off the train and got into a cab. I noticed a few people gazing at the sky and looked up. From my view I saw nothing. Thinking it an airplane the folks were watching, I went on my way.

The enclosed clippings from the next morning's paper as to two true facts, a marvelous Robot and the falling of a large meteorite, made me sit up and take notice.

They corroborate splendidly the stories I thought were interesting but "rubbish." I thought one story, in which Robots were able to talk, highly improbable—then, lo and behold, a real specimen turned up at hand in the very next city I reached!

Now then, in the future if you want me to read your stories don't be destroying the people on Earth. I'd be fearful of reading the daily press and seeing that it had happened!—Jack Tobin, 15 Batavig St., Boston, Mass.

"The 'Corner' First"

Dear Editor:

As I have been reading our magazine for over a year now, I suppose it's about time for me to peck out a few lines and tell you how much I enjoy Astounding Stories. I read every single story, serial, article and "The Readers' Corner" that appears in the magazine, and have enjoyed every one except "The Corpse on the Grating," by Hugh B. Cave. Whew—that gave me the creeps, like a ghost story.

"The Doom from Planet 4," by Jack Williamson, I enjoyed immensely. "The Hands of Aten," by H. G. Winter, sounded kind of familiar. That idol stuff sounded like Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Master Mind of Mars." And another thing, if the cat-walk across the volcano was supported only by two ropes—as I saw it to be—and if the hero cut one rope, then how could the priests walk across it? As a whole, it was good. "The Diamond Thunderbolt," by H. Thompson Rich was good. "The Slave Ship From Space," by A. R. Holmes, I would also list as good. "The Revolt of the Machines," by Nat Scatchner and Arthur L. Zagat, was very interesting.

"The Exile of Time," by Ray Cummings, was much better than his preceding stories, though not as good as "Brigands of the Moon" and "Jetta of the Lowlands."

The cover was grand, and told the story by itself. Wesso is good, so keep him. I was delighted to find that he illustrated every story this time.

I'm glad to see that "Brood of the Dark Moon" is coming next month. I'm sure it will be as good as "Dark Moon."

I enjoy "The Readers' Corner" and always read it first. I can only suggest one thing which I think would improve our mag, that is to cut the edges of the pages even, and then it will be more so than ever "the best magazine on the market." For goodness sake, under no consideration enlarge the length and width of it.—Harry Harvey, 1700 N. Main St., Salisbury, N. C.

Likes Interplanetary Stories

Dear Editor:

The stories which I like to read best are stories of other planets with modern inventions. I also like stories of great electrical experiments.

The most thrilling story I have read in A. S. is "The Doom from Planet 4," by Jack Williamson. In fact, I get a real kick out of reading all your stories. "The Exile of Time," by Ray Cummings, was excellent, and I can say that I enjoyed it very much.—Hugh Moreland, Minter City, Miss.

Action and Reaction

Dear Editor:

I have obtained the July issue of "our mag," and while reading "The Readers' Corner" first, as I invariably do, I came across the letter from Mr. Smith and the reply of Mr. Ernst. In my opinion Mr. Smith is quite right. I have not yet read "The World Behind the Moon," but I have been able to gather enough from the correspondence for my purpose, and I will now attempt to show how wrong is the reasoning of its author.

First, what is space? Since in space there are large bodies—for instance, the Earth—traveling at a speed of, say, 65,000 miles per hour, it follows that space must be reasonably empty, or at least there is nothing in it to produce any appreciable friction, or else the Earth would burn itself out or something equally disastrous would happen. Thus it is obvious that even if space is not a vacuum, as I believe, at least it contains nothing to impede the flight of a projectile.

Now: What is it that drives a rocket? A rocket depends for its motion on the action of the gases not pushing against the air, but by providing, by the explosion, an equal and opposite reaction to that of the rocket. The action is illustrative of Newton's third law of motion, that action and reaction are equal and opposite. Thus a rocket depends for its motion not on the pressure of the gases on the atmosphere but on the reaction to the body of the rocket produced by the explosion of the chemicals.

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As to the experimental proof that a rocket will work in a vacuum, this was given a few months ago in another magazine. It consists of firing a gun in a vacuum. When the weapon is fired it jerks backward and swings for a time. But, perhaps Mr. Ernst will say there is still a small amount of gas in the vacuum. Granted; but it can be calculated that in a vacuum the explosion of the gases in a rocket has more effect than they would have in air, where it is impeded by friction. Thus, since we have vacuum, the rocket will consequently be more efficient in the frictionless space than in the atmosphere.

I hope that Mr. Ernst takes this in the right spirit, as I really like his stories. I would specially like to mention his "Incredible Formula," and congratulate him on it.

That being off my mind I will now show the Editor how to run the magazine! How do you like that for presumption? I must say that it has improved in the last few months almost beyond recognition. The first obvious thing to do is to smooth the edges of the magazine, and make it look decent besides being more convenient when reading. The next, which you seem to be doing, is to make the paper thinner. Change that blue name on white, which is on the backbone of the mag, to black on red or something equally artistic. The illustrations are fine; they cannot be improved. The stories should contain as much science as possible; do not let it degenerate into a fairy tale mag.

I would like to inform your English readers of the formation of the Ilford Science Literary Circle which has been founded by Mr. Walter H. Gillings, 123 Grove Green Road, Laytonstone, London E. 11, England, for the spread of Science Fiction and scientific reading in general. Will any Science Fiction fans in Liverpool communicate with me in an effort to organize the Readers in England? My chief interest is in astronomy and I am a member of the Liverpool Astronomical Society.—Leslie G. Johnson, 46 Mill Lane, Old Swan, Liverpool, Lancashire, Eng.

True! True!

Dear Editor:

As a Reader of Science Fiction for the past thirty years, I think I am fully capable to give you the "lowdown" on the stories you print compared to the classics that have appeared in the last two decades.

I've watched the war rage between the Readers-Who-Want-Reprints and the Ones-Who-Don't with a lot of interest. When such noted Authors as Garrett P. Serviss, George Allan England, Victor Rousseau, and H. G. Wells tried their hand at Science Fiction twenty years ago it was a brand new and untouched field of fiction. Their first few stories were masterpieces to the Readers who read them. They had never before read a story resembling the fantastic type and were therefore glad to get a new kind of fiction, where their minds could run rampage through our galaxy. The stories made a deep impression on them. So did the first detective, the first Western and the first romantic story make an impression on us. The first we read is usually the best.

Then other Authors tried their hand at this new fiction. But plots were getting scarce and they had to use the same general ones over and over. There was nothing else for them to do.

Now your Readers want the "old classics." Friends, take my word for it, there are too few good "classics" to worry much about them. You'll only find upon reading them, that they are the same stuff you are now reading in Astounding Stories, *only not as well written.* The "old classics" were written long ago, don't forget, and the author had to use inventions which are in common use to-day to make someone famous and to have him acclaimed the hero of the world. You would just smile at these stories, and most of the early readers of Science Fiction who have already read the "classics" won't find the same thrill they got when they read them twenty years ago.

I sincerely believe that Astounding Stories to-day is publishing better stories than those classics ever were. And some of the stories *are original, too.* On comparing the current issue with stories that have appeared in the past, I find that out of the six stories in the issue four of them are different from anything I ever read before! "The Doom from Planet 4" is, of course, worn with age, and I'm surprised that you still print such stories. "The Exile of Time" has also been used partly. But if Cummings writes it, it's interesting, even if the plot has been used a hundred times!—John Henderson, 2354 Webster Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Authors Without Humor

Dear Editor:

I accept your invitation to join "The Readers' Corner."

I notice that a certain Gertrude Hemkins wishes no explanations of the science of our stories. I agree to a limit, for we do not want a lecture, or, as she says, "We go to sleep." But on the other hand I like a little explanation; if we were all like Miss Gertrude, we might as well read Grimm's Fairy Tales. Peoples' growing and diminishing when they like is fantastic enough *with* explanation, let alone without. She forgets the other side of the question, that's all.

Talking about diminishing, I fail to see how solid objects such as buttons, clothes, vials, flasks and revolvers could diminish with the human body in Ray Cummings' "Beyond the Vanishing Point." If they did, why is the water out of which the germs came left normal? However, I

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thought this quite a fine story, indeed.

A long time ago you published "Out of the Sea's Depths." Well, I'd like a sequel. Thanks.

One more thing: people do not seem to be satisfied with your covers, pages, etc. Well, what do they buy the magazine for if not to read it? The merit is not in, but on the paper.

The only brickbat I can throw is that your Authors seem to have no sense of humor. It is only cheerfulness and humor that has kept many humans from becoming insane; buck up and be merry!—S. Bright, 318 South Lambeth Rd., Stockwell, London, Eng.

"Miles Ahead"

Dear Editor:

"Hats off, here comes Charley!" is what I always want to say when your magazine comes out. I read one other Science Fiction magazine besides yours, but A. S. is miles ahead.

Once in a while I almost get mad when I think of some of the smug, pettifogging and inaccurate philosophers who are always finding fault with the best Science Fiction mag on the market. I am not the type that likes to criticize, so I won't. I take a magazine for what it is, and if I don't like it, I certainly don't buy it. But you may rest assured that I am a steady Reader of yours, because A. S. is the only real magazine on the market.

I would appreciate it very much if some of the Readers of about my own age, which is 15, would correspond with me.—Hubert Miller, P. O. Box 1023, Casper, Wyo.

A Short Short Story

Dear Editor:

I wish to present one of the most amazing, astounding, incredible, unbelievable short short Science Fiction stories ever written:

Chapter I

The Unbelievable Event

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The End

—Marlene Kay, Seattle, Wash.

Health Being Ruined

Dear Editor:

Why, oh why, can't A. S. be published twice a month? While waiting for the first Thursday of the month, I get gray hair and nervous breakdowns. That's about the only fault of our magazine. The cover illustrations are, in my opinion, perfect; they portray the fiery spirit of scientific fantasy that we Readers so much enjoy. I think that the July issue was about the best we've had for quite a while. The stories were interesting—every last one of them!

I welcome and promise to answer any letters that fellow Science Fiction fans may send; we folks really ought to get acquainted.—Arthur Hermann, 2460 N. 44th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

Terrible

Dear Editor:

Oh! oh! oh! I'm on my vacation and last night when I stopped in Portland, Oregon, I saw something terrible, horrible, awful. "What?" say the Readers. "The American flag being trampled in the mud?" No, not that, but I assure you it was terrible. An old copy of "our" Astounding Stories was being used for a paper-weight.

Yes! True! "Our" precious magazine, fit for a king's royal library, was resting on top of a pile of dusty newspapers lying on the pavement where everyone could see it. Crime, that's what it was! Portland ought to be ashamed of itself. What has this city to say for itself? It should be outlawed for this unforgivable deed!

The new issue of "our" magazine is incredibly fine! Jack Williamson "cops" another cover, I see. His "Doom from Planet 4" was unusual and fine. So were all the other stories in this issue.

I'd like to ask one question. Sometime back I noticed a letter by someone in which was used the abbreviation STF for scientifiction, and what I wish to know is who originated this abbreviation? Did Mr. Ackerman? If he did, I congratulate him. It's a great time-saving device. Everyone ought to use it.

Incidentally, my initials, as you will notice, make STF. That's why I want to find out who did the inventing, as I want to thank him, her or them.—Stone T. Farmington. (No address.)

A Challenge

Dear Editor:

In nearly every Science Fiction story that I read, space is described as an infinite blackness. I would appreciate it very much if someone would *prove* that space is black!

I sincerely think that you have one of the best, if not the best, Science Fiction magazine on the market.

Anyone wishing to discuss space please write to me.—Thomas Daniel, Box 247, Sidney, Nebr.

With Editorial Blushes

Dear Editor:

I notice that in the August issue of Astounding Stories you printed six letters which complimented the artist, Paul, on his fine illustration of "The Earthmen's Burden." I will admit that it was excellent, but Mr. Mortimer Weisinger goes a bit too far in stating that Paul is the greatest of all artists.

I most assuredly do not agree with you,

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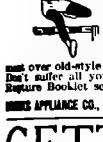

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Mr. Weisinger; in my estimation no artist can even approach Wesso for his marvelous illustrations. I will, however, concede Mr. Paul second place in the ranks of Science Fiction illustrators, but Wesso takes the cake, and you should have all but one or two illustrations by him. Let Paul draw those other two and everything will be okay. Although I do not agree with Mr. Weisinger on the merit of Paul's illustrations, I most heartily agree with him on that masterpiece by C. W. Diffin, "Holocaust." It was a gem.

I shall now proceed to explain to his nibs, Mr. James M. Kennedy, of Ithaca, how it is possible to consider Astounding Stories easily the best magazine on the market.

I believe that this rests entirely in the hands of the Editor of a magazine. If an Editor will accept the usual run of Science Fiction stories and clutter up his magazine with them, there will surely be a big difference between his magazine and another that has an intelligent editor like Mr. Bates, who knows what the public wants and gives them what they want. I think that Mr. Bates has managed Astounding Stories admirably, and I am sure that many of you other Readers feel the same as I do, so let's drink a toast to Mr. Harry Bates, the finest Editor in the world (uncensored—Ed.).—W. G. Diehl, 145-38 Eighth Ave., Malba, L. I., N. Y.

"Except That It—"

Dear Editor:

I must express myself in regards to "our" magazine, so here goes:

A. S. is the best magazine of its kind on the market. I formerly read two other Science Fiction magazines, but after I read my first issue of A. S. I quit them. They seemed, well, "not so hot." I cannot really criticize A. S.—except that it might be twice as thick and come out four times a month.

And now for my idea. Why not add five or six pages and in them publish a short story by one of Astounding Stories' Readers. You may discover some new authors that way?—Louis Kahn, 1146 E. 21st St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

A Dull One

Dear Editor:

I have read Astounding Stories for half a year and find it most interesting, but in the August issue there was one story that was most unoriginal and dull. I am referring to "The Moon Weed," by Harl Vincent.

How Van's apparatus brought the seeds from the moon requires a little more explanation. It is silly to just say the disrupted protons and electrons. Giving a little more scientific explanation would have made the story more interesting, but instead we have dull statistics and a conclusion that is quite obvious.

I wonder if the Author knows that the story, "The Ivy War," in another Science Fiction magazine is not unlike this story. —Arnold D. Fisher, 1125 Sheridan, Bronx, N. Y.

Thoughtful Restraint

Dear Editor:

I'm not going to criticize the stories in your excellent August issue, because I know from experience that whenever I come across a letter in "The Readers' Corner" describing in detail the faults in some story, I scurry to a bookcase in which I have a couple of hundred assorted Science Fiction magazines and look up that story. This takes time and trouble, so, thinking that perhaps other Readers do the same, I will stop this type of criticizing.

I wonder why Paul the Great didn't illustrate anything in the August issue? Especially after you used him once in a previous issue?

By the way, do you arrange the stories in Astounding Stories in an order best calculated by you to please the Readers of the magazine?

Someone in "The Readers' Corner" said that "Anybody who yells about the color of the cover and the durability of the paper is not very interested in Astounding Stories." I disagree with this Reader. People who criticize your magazine are trying to help Astounding Stories to improve and surpass other magazines in the field of Science Fiction. Right now it is foolish to say that one magazine is better than another, for they all have much the same authors.—Robert Baldwin, 350 Hazel Ave., Highland Park, Ill.

"—And Winter Knocks Him Out!"

Dear Editor:

The following is a classification of the stories in the August issue: "The Midget from the Island"—unparagoned; "The Moon Weed"—super-fine; "The Danger from the Deep"—tip-top; "The Port of Missing Planes"—inimitable.

I don't list "Brood of the Dark Moon" as I never read serials until I have them complete—and then I usually read them without eating a bite, drinking a drop, or sleeping a wink!

Strange to say, Astounding is getting better with each issue. I know you've heard that line before, but if a thing's true, there's no harm in repeating it. I don't see how you do it. Most magazines run a good issue once in a while and then go back to mediocre stories. But gosh darn it, you've been keeping a high standard for a year and a half! Every issue is rated by me at 99¾%. I won't give you the other ¼% until I see a reprint in "our" magazine.

I must congratulate you on one of your new authors, H. G. Winter. Readers, give him a big hand.

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Mr. H. G. Winter, the challenger for the World's Author Championship! (Claps) The Bell! Mr. Winter leads with his "Hands of Aten." The champ misses with an interplanetary story, and Winter knocks him out with "The Midget from the Island." Time of bout: two issues. Wait a minute, folks, we'll try and get the new champ to come over to "The Readers' Corner" and say something. Here you are, Mr. Winter. "Thank you folks for enjoying my stories, and I wish to say that I hope to have many more stories for you real soon." Thank you, Mr. Winter.

You've captured many top-notch authors from other magazines, but there's still some "gold in them thar hills!" Among the hills such nuggets are still waiting to be picked up: A. Merritt, Otis Adelbert Kline, Stanton A. Coblentz and Edgar Rice Burroughs. In fact, if you get a story by any of these I'll give you that other ¼%, and then you can smile and say, "Now I've got a 100% magazine"—without bribing a certain Reader by using reprints!—Isadore Kluck, 2362 Webster Ave., New York, N. Y.

"The Readers' Corner"

All readers are extended a sincere and cordial invitation to "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and join in our monthly discussion of stories, authors, scientific principles and possibilities—everything that's of common interest in connection with our Astounding Stories.

Although from time to time the Editor may make a comment or so, this is a department primarily for *Readers,* and we want you to make full use of it. Likes, dislikes, criticisms, explanations, roses, brickbats, suggestions — everything's welcome here; so "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and discuss it with all of us!

—*The Editor.*

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32x4	4.10	2.05	32x4.50	3.75	1.95
31x4	4.15	2.05	33x4.50	3.90	1.95
33x4	4.25	2.10	34x4.50	3.95	2.00
32x4½	4.50	2.25	30x5.00	3.95	2.00
33x4½	4.60	2.30	31x5.00	4.00	2.05
34x4½	4.70	2.35	32x5.00	4.10	2.10
35x4½	4.80	2.40	33x5.00	4.20	2.15
36x4½	4.90	2.45	34x5.00	4.30	2.20
37x4½	5.00	2.50	35x5.00	4.40	2.25
35x5	5.40	2.70	36x5.00	4.50	2.30
36x5	5.50	2.75	37x5.00	4.60	2.35
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